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Don Diablo,

THE PLANTER-CORSAIR;

OR,

The Rivals of the Sea.

A ROMANCE OF THE GULF.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MON-
TEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," "THE CHEVA-
LIER CORSAIR," "FLORETTE," "WITH-
OUT A HEART," ETC., ETC.

PROLOGUE.

OUT FROM THE SEA.

"Oh, father! is there no hope?"

"None, my child; the wreck will sink within
the hour, and, with our boats washed away,
and no spars left with which to build a raft, we
must go down into the depths."

The speakers were father and daughter, and

they clung to the shattered bulwarks of a vessel
that the hurricane the night before had made a
wreck of.

Dismasted, with half the crew washed into
the sea, and those that remained crouching
down forward awaiting the end they knew
must come, their lot indeed seemed hopeless.

To men, who must meet danger, and greet
death with a bold front, it was terrible enough,
but to the young and beautiful girl, clinging to
her father's arm, it was indeed a fearful thing
to have to sink forever beneath the dark blue
waves, and have the world and its hopes shut
out from her gaze, just as she was crossing the
threshold of lovely womanhood, and life wore
for her its rosiest tints.

After a short visit in Havana, Don Henrico
Hildos and his only child, Corinne, were re-
turning to their home, one of the grandest old
haciendas on the Mexican coast, when the
vessel in which they took passage to Vera Cruz
was overtaken by the hurricane, blown far off
her course, and left a wreck upon the waters,
and rapidly sinking deeper and deeper into the
depths that must be her grave.

Around them all was a wild waste of storm-
swept waters, and with no sail in sight, despair
rested upon the face of each one on board the
ill-fated craft.

Together the father and daughter stood, pale,
yet calm, and having consigned their souls to
the keeping of the Virgin, they bided their
time, waiting, watching, and hoping against
hope.

"See! Father, is that not a vessel?"

The voice of Corinne Hildos rung out almost
like a shriek of joy as she pointed across the
waters to an object that had caught her sight.

"A sail! a sail!" cried Don Hildos, in an
ecstasy of delight, and from the crouching,
hopeless crew broke a cheer, for their eyes now
fell upon the vessel.

It was a schooner, with only jib and main-
sail set, and reefed down, and she was driving
along before the gale at a terrific speed.

Instantly hats were waved in air, and to-
gether the half-score of human beings on the
wreck raised their voices in loud, ringing hails.

But the driving craft was a long way off,
and the fierce wind blew their shouts back into



"I AM AN OFFICER OF THE UNITED STATES NAVY, AND I DENOUNCE THAT MAN AS DON DIABLO, THE RED ROVER."

their faces, and hope again began to settle down upon each heart, when Corinne darted down into the cabin, and a moment after returned with an old musket, which her father quickly seized from her hands and discharged.

The report rung out over the waters, and again and again it was fired, until at last the sharp bows of the flying schooner were seen to sweep round, and, as it headed toward the wreck, a wild yell broke from the joyous crew.

"It is an armed vessel—an American, a Carthaginian cruiser, I think," said the Don, with his spyglass leveled upon the stranger.

"I care not what he is, father, so he saves us from death," answered Corinne, and, with the others, she kept her eyes fixed upon the coming craft, which soon after lay to a cable's-length distant, while in trumpet tones came the hail in Spanish:

"Wreck ahoy! who, and what are you?"

"A Mexican brig, from Havana to Vera Cruz, and sinking fast," answered the officer of the dismayed vessel.

"Ay, ay; I will send a boat to board you," was the cheering response, and, in spite of the rough sea, a gallant crew manned a life-cutter, and after a hard pull reached the wreck.

A handsome, dark-faced young officer, dressed in a brilliant uniform, boarded the wreck, and, at sight of Corinne, said politely, while he raised his hat:

"I thought I was not mistaken in believing I saw a lady on board, and I rejoice in being able to save you, señorita."

"I am Don Henrico Hildos, of Mexico, señor, and this is my daughter, and we owe you our lives," said the Don, stepping forward.

"Indeed, señor! I have heard of you as the wealthiest *ranchero* on the Mexican coast, and your daughter as the fairest of the fair; I am Captain Reno Quesala of the Carthaginian navy, and at your service wholly; but come, for this wreck seems going down fast."

Tenderly into his boat the young captain placed Corinne, and giving her father a seat at her side, ordered the crew of the wrecked vessel to get in also, and back to the schooner went the cutter, and soon after all were safely on board.

Another trip back to the wreck and the boat brought the Don's baggage and such of the cargo as could be saved; but hardly had it left the ill-fated craft when, with a mighty plunge, down into the sea went the shattered hull never more to meet the gaze of human eye.

THE LOVERS.

Hacienda Hildos was the grandest old home on the Mexican coast in the early days of the present century, and around it spread away thousands of acres of land, dotted with the vast herds belonging to the wealthy Mexican.

Within the substantial abode all was luxurious comfort, and the fame of Don Hildos as a hospitable host was known far and wide, as was also the beauty of his only child, the Señorita Corinne, who, at the time of the opening of this story, was in her seventeenth year, and as lovely in face and form as in character.

While the humblest peon on the ranch was ever willing to worship the fair maiden, the cavaliers and *rancheros* for miles and miles up and down the coast and far back into the interior looked upon the Hacienda Hildos as the Mecca of their hopes, for they longed one day to win the love of its lovely mistress.

But though handsome gallants by the hundred laid siege to Corinne's little heart she had remained uncaught in love's fetters until that stormy day when she was rescued from the sinking wreck by the handsome Carthaginian captain.

Whether it was prompted by gratitude for her life, or that he seemed different from the *rancheros* at home, or the gallants she had met in Havana, I know not; but certain it is his dark eyes pierced straight into her heart, and it was with a sigh of regret that she awoke one morning in the schooner's luxurious cabin to find the vessel at anchor off the Hildos Hacienda.

Accompanying the Don ashore, Captain Reno Quesala had accepted an invitation to remain a guest for some time, and from that moment drove the Mexican cavaliers crazy with jealousy, for they could see that the Señorita Corinne bent upon the Carthaginian loving glances that they had never been the recipients of.

When, after a week's lying at anchor in the little bay near the hacienda, the rakish-looking cruiser, with its dark-faced, wild-looking crew, weighed anchor and stood out to sea, the Mexican beaux sent after her many a wish for a rapid cruise to the depths infernal, and again pressed their suits with Corinne.

But she, a Mexican beauty, and consequently a natural coquette, returned their sweet glances and—refused all their offers, and longed for the speedy return of her lover.

At length the sun rose one morning, some months after his departure, to show his schooner lying at anchor in the bay, and to bring curses upon him for his return from those who wished him dead, and joy to the heart of Corinne that he had kept his word and come back to her.

When the lovers met, in an orange-grove near the beach, there was one who saw their meeting, and swore it should be their last, for, up to the time of Corinne's meeting Captain Quesala, he had believed himself to be the favored suitor.

That one was a wealthy young *ranchero*, whose estate joined the Don's, and who had scores of maidens most anxious to bear his name; but he had sworn to win the Señorita Hildos, if he had to kill the Carthaginian to get rid of him.

Burning with jealous rage, when he saw the meeting between the two, he at once made up his mind to seek a quarrel with him, not doubting the result, as he had perfect confidence in his skill with sword and pistol.

The opportunity soon offered, as the Don gave a grand ball at his hacienda, to which all the beauties and cavaliers were invited, and Juan Mendez lost no time in seeking an opportunity to draw Captain Quesala into a difficulty with him.

Something to his surprise the captain seemed perfectly willing for a quarrel, and the result was a duel the following morning, in which the Carthaginian ran the Mexican through the heart with his sword, and set sail that very day for another cruise, the accepted lover of the Señorita Hildos.

THE PIRATE'S OATH.

A year has gone by since Don Hildos and his daughter were saved from the wreck, and the time has rolled round when the engagement of the fair Mexican and the Carthaginian captain is to be consummated by marriage.

The grand old hacienda is ablaze with lights, and happy-faced peons are gliding hither and thither preparing the tons of edibles and wines ordered for the festive occasion, while, from far and wide, come the youths and maidens, old Dons and señoras, to participate in the joyous scene, for though many gallant hearts are sad to see Corinne the bride of a stranger, they will not miss the good cheer they know that Don Henrico will set before them.

At last daylight fades away, twilight comes, and then the moon, in a cloudless sky, appears to throw her silvery radiance upon the scene, the grand plaza of the hacienda, which has been turned into fairy-like beauty by myriads of lamps, which cast bright reflections upon gorgeous flowers, the scent of which is almost overpowering.

Beneath a silk canopy an altar of roses has been erected, and upon velvet cushions the bride and groom are to kneel, and be united in wedlock by the old gray-haired priest who, twenty years before, performed the same rites for the Don and Corinne's mother.

That afternoon the Carthaginian cruiser had sailed into the bay with her flags gayly flying, and saluted the hacienda with eighteen guns, one for each year of Corinne's life, and just at sunset the dashing captain had rowed ashore, accompanied by his officers and many of his crew.

At the hacienda gates they had been met by a number of young Mexicans, and conducted to the plaza, where the sailors formed in line, while their commander entered the mansion to seek his bride, and the expectant crowd awaited in breathless eagerness the coming of the wedding procession.

Soon low chanting was heard by many voices, and nearer and nearer it came, until out upon the plaza came the choristers, and following them the bride and groom, the former radiantly lovely in her exquisite bridal robe and veil, and the latter proud and handsome in his gorgeous uniform.

Up to the altar of flowers they went, the voices still singing, and there the priest met them, and the ceremony began.

But a few words only had been said by the holy father, when suddenly through the crowd came a tall form, and in ringing tones cried:

"Hold! Priest, commit not sin, for I forbid it."

"And who are you, sir?" sternly said Don Henrico, confronting the stranger, and all breathlessly awaited the answer, while every eye was turned upon the dashing, daring man, who had invaded the scene of sacredness.

In the same clear tones came the answer: "I am an officer of the United States navy, and I denounce that man as *Don Diablo*, the *Red Rover* of the *Rio Grande*."

A chorus of shrieks from women, wild cries from men, and a swaying motion of the crowd followed this terrible announcement.

But, white as though dead, stood Corinne Hildos, her eyes turned upon her lover, as if beseeching him to speak, while he, with a face as black as rage and hate could make it, hissed forth, as he strode toward the American:

"Liar! slanderer! I will have thy life for this."

"So be it; come on and I will meet thee, Don Diablo, for I tracked thee here to cross thy sword," was the fearless answer, and the swords of the two men crossed with a savage clash, but almost instantly had that of the Carthaginian been struck from his hand.

"You are my prisoner, sir pirate!"

"Never! Ho, hounds, to the rescue!" cried the Carthaginian, and his men pressed forward; but were suddenly checked by a loud cry, and into their midst dashed one of their own number who had been left on board the schooner, and his words seemed to strike terror to the hearts of his comrades.

"Quick! señor capitán, for the love of the Virgin, fly! A large American cruiser is heading for the bay. Fly, or all is lost!"

With a bitter curse upon Americans, the Carthaginian turned to Corinne:

"Come, my bride, come with me, and we'll fly far from here."

"No, señor, not until you have proven this charge false," said the maiden, firmly.

"He cannot prove it false, lady; I swear it upon the honor of an American officer."

"Come, Corinne, for, be I what I may, I love you," cried the accused man.

"Never! Your words confess your guilt, and—I—hate—you!"

With a low moan she fell back in her father's arms, while the man who so nearly made her his wife, sprung forward to seize her; but the young American officer leaped between them, and cried:

"Back! or I'll save the hangman work."

"Ha! ha! ha! thwarted am I? come, hounds, and tear this dog to pieces!"

"No, no, señor, for he has scores of seamen at his call," cried one of the schooner's officers.

"Ha! say you so, Pedro? Then we must be off; but hear me, ere I go: I am *Don Diablo*, and I swear by heaven and hell to have revenge for this."

He sprung suddenly out of reach of the American's sword, and calling to his men to rally around him, started for the plaza gates, and was soon making for his boats, while with a loud signal, the man who had denounced him, started in pursuit.

And, to the signal came answering cries from beyond the northern wall of the hacienda, and soon appeared half a hundred American seamen, and in hot pursuit they were led after the retreating pirates.

But the boats were gained, and in spite of the hot fire of the Americans, Don Diablo reached his schooner, which was already under sail, and headed for a narrow channel way at the upper end of the bay, just as a large vessel-of-war came in sight around a wooded point of land, and opened fire upon the buccaneer craft.

Sullenly Don Diablo returned the fire from his stern guns, while, under his pilotage, his fleet schooner gained the open Gulf, and sped away like the wind, her daring commander once more free upon the blue waters.

CHAPTER I.

DON DIABLO.

ONE balmy afternoon, a score of years after the scenes described in the Prologue, a clipper-built brigantine was cruising along the coast of Cuba, and slowly approaching a large ship that was also running along parallel with the shores under a light breeze from the south and west that just ruffled the blue waters.

The ship, approaching from the east, was a heavy sailer, for under clouds of canvas she made but little progress, while the armed brigantine was making seven out of the five-knot breeze.

Upon the latter every yard was in its place, every sail accurately set, and in the high and saucy rake of her masts and symmetry of her hull she presented a rare model of marine beauty.

Standing eastward, on a course to meet the ship, she had the wind two points abaft the beam, so that she carried foretopmast and lower studding sails on her starboard arm, and presented a strange contrast to the lazily-sailing ship, for one was bold, swift and like a hawk after its prey, while the other was moving like a vulture on the wing.

The larger vessel, upon sighting the brigantine, bore up a little and hoisted the Spanish flag; but the little craft held silently on her course, as though indifferent to the actions of the other, though a closer look upon her decks would show that her officers and crew were watching the large craft with far more than the ordinary interest shown in sighting a merchantman at sea.

"That is our vessel, *De Vigne*," said an elderly officer, in the uniform of a captain, addressing a young and exceedingly handsome lieutenant who stood by his side on the brigantine's quarter-deck.

"Yes, Captain Graham, there is no doubt of its being the Spanish Queen, for, though I only saw her by night in the harbor, I recognize her general outline," replied the young officer.

"Then show the stars and stripes at the peak, *De Vigne*, and send a shot over her as a hint to heave to, and we will soon know if you were right regarding that accursed *Don Diablo*."

Up to the peak went the American flag, and from the sharp bows of the brig burst a stream of fire and smoke, and away went the flying shot toward the ship.

Striking the water near the vessel it was indeed a hint to heave to, and one which the

Spanish commander at once determined to act upon, seeing which an old man, for his long hair and beard were white as snow, cried out in stern tones:

"What! señor captain, do you intend to let that insolent Yankee board you at will?"

"What else is to be done, señor; I carry but three small guns, and he has four to a side, and fully sixty men?"

"And with passengers and crew you have seventy."

"But we are not at war with America, señor," persisted the vessel's captain.

"Then why permit him to board you upon your own shores, for see, the coast of Cuba is not a marine league distant?" and the old gentleman pointed to the green shores of the "Ever Faithful Isle."

"I am sorry, señor, but I must heave to, and when he sees that I am really a Spaniard, and not an Englishman, as he doubtless believes, I will not be molested," and the captain gave orders for the ship to be brought-to, while the dignified and military-looking old gentleman turned angrily away, with something very like a muttered oath, and once more glanced at the coming brigantine, just as another iron hint was sent over the vessel.

"Lively, lands, or he'll send a shot into us next; ready all! lay her to, helmsman, called out the Spanish captain through his trumpet; but louder than his hoarse command, and as clear as a clarion, suddenly arose a stern order:

"Ho! Rovers of the Rio Grandel do your work well!"

Instantly the ship was a scene of wild confusion, for more than half of the passengers and one-third of the crew suddenly threw off their disguises as honest people, and with wild yells rallied around their chief, who, no longer an aged man, for his gray beard and wig lay on the deck, stood now a dark-faced, stern and daring buccaneer—none other than Don Diablo.

A few pistol-shots, the clashing of steel, and cries for mercy, and Don Diablo held the vessel, upon which he at once crowded all the canvas she could spread, and sped away from the now thoroughly astonished Americans on the brigantine.

"Man those guns there, you devils, and see if you cannot sweep those fellows from their decks, and then their pretty brigantine is ours," shouted Don Diablo, as he cast the citizen's suit he wore aside, and appeared in a naval uniform, a splendid-looking man indeed, were it not for the fierce fire in his black eyes, and the stern, cruel look upon his mouth.

Having changed her course suddenly, the ship sped along with all the speed her canvas could get out of her, while the brigantine had immediately spread more sail and swept along in pursuit at a pace that threatened soon to overhaul the chase.

"I know not what to think of that strange movement on the ship, De Vigne; they certainly were fighting among themselves; but, on account of the number of fair passengers on board, I do not care to fire upon him," said Captain Curtis Graham, on the brigantine, at the same time closely watching the ship with his glass.

"They are going to fire on us, sir, for there comes their shot," answered Howard De Vigne, and as the words left his lips, the three guns of the ship, which had been run aft, belched forth their iron hail, and the rigging and sails of the American craft were cut in several places, while two of her crew fell to the deck mortally wounded.

"To your quarters! forward there at that pivot gun!" cried Captain Graham, now thoroughly aroused.

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the midshipman in charge.

"Cut that fellow's rigging in pieces, but, mind you, don't fire at his hull," commanded the captain, and instantly, almost, the fire of the ship was returned, and a running fight began.

But where the ship's gunners fired at the hull of the brigantine, the Americans only aimed at the rigging of their enemy, and the well-aimed shots began to send down spars from aloft, and cut away the fields of canvas, which greatly lessened the speed of the chase, which was now but a short distance ahead.

"Boarders away! we'll carry her by boarding, De Vigne," cried Captain Graham, and two boarding parties were quickly formed, one forward and the other aft, so that they would take their foes between two fires.

One of these parties was led by the captain, the other by Howard De Vigne, who said in distinct tones:

"Men, that vessel has been seized by Don Diablo and his crew, who were disguised as passengers; remember, you have him to fight now, and he shows no mercy."

A few moments more of suspense, with the guns of both vessels flashing constantly, and doing more or less damage to each vessel, and the Spaniard and the American were close aboard of each other, for the sharp bow of the brigantine was up with the high stern of the merchant craft, and all knew that another moment would bring a hand-to-hand conflict upon the decks of one or the other vessel, and that

no mercy need be expected from the man whose cruel deeds upon the sea had won for him the name of Don Diablo.

CHAPTER II.

BETRAYED.

THE Spanish Queen was a comfortable, though not fast packet ship, that sailed from Havana to Vera Cruz, and thence to Galveston and New Orleans, and was wont to carry a well-filled list of passengers on each trip.

Having stowed away her cargo, and gotten her passengers on board, the packet set sail one pleasant afternoon from Havana, with less dread to her commander than ever before in making his voyages, for only a week before it was that the famous rover of the Gulf, Don Diablo, had been sunk in his schooner, off the Cuban coast, with all on board, by an American frigate, upon which he had run in the darkness and storm.

With this scourge at the bottom of the Gulf, there was little to dread other than the ordinary dangers of the sea, and all the passengers were light-hearted at the thought that they would not have to fear chase and capture by the fleet schooner of Don Diablo.

Among the passengers on the Spanish Queen were a United States naval officer and his daughter, who were bound to New Orleans, and from thence to Washington, where Captain Merton Marsden had been ordered to take command of a brig-of-war.

A man of vast wealth, he had been on leave of absence for a few months, spending the time in Cuba, where his only child, Lucille, a daughter of seventeen, had accompanied him, and where, too, she had lost her heart to Howard De Vigne, the dashing young lieutenant in the navy, to whom her father had introduced her at a ball at the Captain-General's, some months before.

Having obtained permission from his captain to run up the coast to Havana, from where his brigantine was anchored, Howard De Vigne had gone in a cutter, with two seamen as his companions, and arrived in time to catch the Spanish Queen before she sailed.

With a heavy heart at parting with Lucille, he had accompanied the beautiful girl and her father on board, and bade her a last farewell, and wished them *bon voyage* just as the Spanish sailors raised the anchor from the bottom.

Springing into his cutter, he headed for the shore as the ship left her anchorage, and giving his two seamen a couple of pesos to amuse themselves with until his return, he was about to go up into the town on some business he wished to transact ere he left Havana, when he was accosted by an old woman, leaning on a staff, who spoke to him in a whining voice, asking for aid.

Thrusting a piece of silver to her, he was about to pass on, when he noticed with surprise that her hand was white, extremely small, and exquisitely shaped.

"You certainly possess a beautiful hand, señora, for one of your seeming age and poverty," he said, with a searching glance at her face, and speaking in Spanish.

"Señor, I am not what I seem, and I asked you for alms to speak with you; you just came from on board the Spanish Queen?" she asked, in a voice that was strangely soft and musical, and in remarkable contrast to her beggarly appearance.

"I did; why?" and he seemed puzzled by the words and manner of the woman.

"Didst see on board an elderly gentleman, one who appeared like a Spanish Don?"

"Yes, I saw such a one as you speak of; a tall figure, slightly bent, well dressed, leaning on a gold-headed cane, and with snowy hair and beard."

"You suspect not who he is, señor Americano?"

"Why should I suspect him of being other than he seems?"

"He is no more what he appears to the gaze than am I, for he wears a disguise, as I do," said the woman, almost fiercely.

"And why should I be interested in your strange disguises?"

"You will be when I tell you that I am but eighteen, and that my father is a Cuban of wealth on the coast, and from whose home I fled to become, as I believed, the wife of an honorable man, but whom I found to be the basest wretch that lives."

She spoke with almost savage earnestness, and at once Howard De Vigne became interested in her, and said, kindly:

"Yours has indeed been a sad fate; but has the man deserted you?"

"Yes, he is the old man whom you saw on the Spanish Queen?"

"Ha! can this be true?" asked the American, in surprise.

"No wonder you seem surprised, for his disguise was perfect, more so than mine; but then I was in haste to reach here before he sailed, and forgot that my hands might betray me."

"And did you intend to sail on the packet?"

"Yes."

"Did the one you accuse as so vile know you intended so doing?"

"Ah no; he would take my life, as he has many another who was in his way, for what cared he to have me in his way when bright eyes were there he wished for his own?"

The American officer started, for there swept before his vision the beautiful eyes of Lucille Marsden.

"Could she mean Lucille, I wonder?" he asked himself, mentally.

And the woman seemed to read his thoughts, and answered:

"Ah! I see that there is one on board to whom your thoughts turn, señor; that one is she of whom I speak, for the man who so cruelly deceived me, has set his hopes upon the lovely daughter of your countryman, Captain Marsden."

"Great God! can this be true?" and Howard De Vigne turned pale.

"It is true, señor; but had I reached the vessel in time to take passage on her, he would never have turned his baleful eyes upon another woman," and she spoke in a manner of such intense earnestness, that the young lieutenant asked:

"What would you have done?"

"Driven my knife into his guilty heart?"

Howard De Vigne fairly started at the hatred in her words, but, as he believed Lucille Marsden in danger, he mentally wished that the strange woman had been in time to catch the packet ship.

"You do indeed hate your false lover," he said.

"Ay, from the inmost depths of my heart I hate him; ay, so much do I hate him, señor, that I will tell you who he is, for I know what you will do."

"What will I do?" he asked, more and more puzzled by the woman's words and manner.

"Hang him to the yard-arm of your vessel."

"He deserves a severe punishment for wronging you as he has done; but here I have no authority."

"Where is your vessel, señor?"

"Lying at anchor in a lagoon, some leagues down the coast."

"If I prove to you that you have authority, will you use it?"

"And punish your false lover?"

"Yes."

"I must be certain that he has committed crimes that give me the right; did I find him acting cruelly toward you, I would quickly end his career; but, as it is, I am powerless to act, though were I your brother, or your father, I would track him to the ends of the earth, but what I killed him."

"I believe you, for you have a noble face; but if you will make me a promise, I will tell you who that man is."

"What promise can I make you?"

"To hang him to the yard-arm of your vessel, or carry him to the United States for trial."

"I am not the commander of the brigantine; only second officer."

"Still you promise, if in your power, for were you to take him prisoner and give him over to the authorities here, he has such power that he would escape them, though an immense price is set on his head."

"And who is this remarkable man, may I ask?" and Howard De Vigne was now most deeply interested.

She drew nearer to him, and asked in a whisper:

"Have you ever heard of Don Diablo?"

"Who has not?"

"Well, the pretended old man on the Spanish Queen is Don Diablo."

"Impossible! for he was sunk with his vessel, and all on board, by an American frigate some days ago."

"His vessel was sunk; but Satan takes care of his own and his namesake, and Don Diablo escaped, with a score of his men, by swimming to the shore."

"Great God! can this be true?"

"As true as the Virgin Mother's love!"

"And he is now on board the Spanish Queen?" and the young officer turned deadly pale.

"Yes, where the Señorita Marsden is."

"Woman, how know you this?" and De Vigne laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"He comes to me whenever he is in Havana, and he came the day after his vessel was sunk, and I secured for him the disguise he wears; but, by accident, I heard his plan with one of his crew, to sail in the Spanish Queen to the United States, and there get another fleet vessel, or, if possible, should the ship remain long enough in port, and he could find a proper craft, to get it in Vera Cruz, or Galveston."

"And you heard this?"

"I did, and more, and then began my hate for him, as I heard him say that he had met the Señorita Marsden at the Captain-General's ball, and intended yet to get her into his possession, and again I tell you, señor, that she is on the Spanish Queen and in his power."

"I will at once seek the Captain-General, and ask that a fleet—"

"Don't do so, for if a Spanish vessel is sent

in pursuit, I tell you Don Diablo will escape; your own vessel lies down the coast, and—"

"I will go to the brigantine immediately and start in pursuit."

"Hold! the wind is light, and you could not make three knots an hour in your cutter, if that is it lying there; but go to the inn and secure a volante with swift horses, and you can arrive ahead of the packet ship, for see, outside there is almost a dead calm."

"I will do as you suggest, and I thank you for all you have told me; is there no way in which I can prove my appreciation?" fervently said the young American officer.

"Yes, hang Don Diablo to the yard-arm of your vessel, or carry him to the United States for trial and then I know he will be put to death."

"One or the other will be done, if he proves Don Diablo the pirate."

"You will find him whom I say; and, señor, ere he die, when the rope presses tightly around his throat, but while he can yet listen to you, breathe into his ear these words:

"You owe your death to Nita Sabinas—"

"What! are you—"

"Señor, go! for you should not tarry."

She spoke in a commanding tone, and, raising his cap, Howard De Vigne turned away, and hastily retraced his way to his boat, and leaving it in charge of a waterman called to his two seamen to follow him up into the town, and half an hour after they were in a volante dashing swiftly along the coast highway to join the American brigantine-of-war Vidette, which upon the arrival of its lieutenant at once sailed in search of the Spanish Queen.

CHAPTER III.

THE CAPTURE.

THE scene on the Spanish Queen, when Don Diablo and his crew, threw off their disguises beggars description, for the supposed passengers had all been gathered aft on the quarter-deck, looking alternately at the receding shores of Cuba, and the pretty brigantine, which they felt no dread of, as the American flag went up to the peak.

But, with the ringing command of the pirate chief to his crew, some passengers, who had been believed to be women, suddenly cast their feminine attire to the winds, and appeared in sailor costume, and armed to the teeth, while padres, planters and shopkeepers, as instantaneously changed into wild-looking cut-throats, all of whom rallied amidships, to await further orders.

They soon came, for the real passengers and crew of the Spanish Queen were set upon, and those who were not hurled into the cabin, and had the companionway closed upon them, were mercilessly cut down and their bodies robbed and thrown into the sea.

Leaning against the taffrail, gazing upon the approaching brigantine, had been a dignified, handsome man of middle age, while at his side stood a young, and exquisitely lovely maiden, whose face had flushed at the words of her companion.

"That is the Vidette, as I live, Lucille! What a pity that De Vigne didn't sail with us, so that he could now rejoin his vessel?"

The maiden thought so too, but made no reply, and a few moments after the deeds occurred that brought a scene of horror and death upon them, and placed the ill-fated vessel in the hands of a sea fiend, for such had Don Diablo become.

At a glance, Captain Marsden had seen that resistance was useless, for the crew and passengers were panic-stricken, and, hoping for help from the brigantine, he threw himself upon a pirate near him, wrenched his sword from his grasp, and seizing his daughter in his arms, sprung toward the cabin companionway.

Quickly a burly buccaneer leaped before him, but was disarmed and run through the heart by the American, who again pressed toward the cabin, to be again confronted by foes.

"Hold! on your lives hurt not that maiden," cried the ringing voice of Don Diablo, and, as his men paused at his command, Captain Marsden sprung into the open companionway, and instantly behind him it was made fast.

"Thank God! for the present you are safe, my child, and if Curtis Graham doesn't retake the ship, I know not the man," cried Captain Marsden, as he placed the half-fainting Lucille upon a lounge, and others pressed around him to ask what was to be done.

"My friends, a gallant little American cruiser is in chase, and we have hopes of a rescue; if the pirates prove too strong, then we must hold this cabin, at all odds, to the last, and, Lucille, if I fall, use this."

He stepped to his state-room and returned with his sword and pistols, and a dagger, which he gave to his daughter.

"Father!"

"I mean it, my child; when you see me fall, drive it to your heart, and save yourself from a fate worse than death."

The young girl shuddered, but she took the weapon, and said, in a firm voice:

"If I see you die, father, I will do as you command."

A murmur of admiration went through the score or more of passengers gathered in the cabin, and several young girls crept with scared, white faces to Lucille's side, while Captain Marsden called around him the men of the party, and, all being armed, they awaited in breathless suspense the result.

From the stern ports they saw the Vidette coming swiftly on in chase, firing her bow-guns, and heard the crashing of spars, and the tearing of sails, as the iron shot tore through them, while above their heads the ship's decks vibrated beneath the roar of the howitzers, and the trampling of feet, as the pirates moved about.

Ever and anon, the stern, ringing voice of Don Diablo was heard, and then a crashing sound, as some shattered spar fell to the deck, followed by a cry of pain, a groan, and then down past the stern ports went a dark object, and a heavy splash told that some outlaw, dead, or only wounded, had been hurled into the sea.

"See how bravely the Vidette comes on, and five minutes more will lay her alongside," said Captain Marsden, anxious to keep the eyes of the passengers off the struggling, dying pirate, who had been mercilessly thrown into the sea by his comrades.

"Oh, father! see, there is Howard De Vigne," suddenly cried Lucille, recognizing the young officer on the Vidette.

"By Neptune! you are right, Lucille, and that accounts for the determined action of Graham against this vessel; De Vigne evidently, after leaving us, found out our danger in some way, and now we are safe."

"Safe!" ejaculated a number of the frightened group, with hope and doubt commingled in their tone, for they knew not the incentive that the young American officer had to fight Don Diablo to the death.

"Yes, safe, for De Vigne will never be beaten off, should the band of Don Diablo outnumber him, which I know is the case, as the Vidette is very short-handed," remarked Captain Marsden, and, after a moment, he added:

"We men here know our duty, and when the Vidette's crew board we must reach the deck and join them in the fight— Ha! hear that!"

Above the roar of the guns now arose the stern order in Captain Graham's voice:

"Lay her alongside, helmsman!"

"Boarders, follow me!" came in the ringing tones of Howard De Vigne, and the next moment the two vessels were together, grappels were thrown, and with a wild cheer the Americans bounded upon the deck of the Spanish Queen.

It was an hour of terror to those within the cabin of the packet-ship, for they well knew that Don Diablo had brought with him nearly three-score men, and that the Vidette had not half a hundred to face the formidable outlaw chief, and the cries of the pirates were fearful to listen to.

"Come, men! we must gain the deck," cried Captain Graham, and he opened the port, and reaching up, seized the taffrail, and drew himself up on the ship's deck, while he was followed by half a dozen of the male passengers.

A savage scene met the gaze of Captain Marsden and his comrades, for Captain Graham lay wounded near him, and many more were down, some dead, some dying, while the fierce onslaught of Howard De Vigne had driven the pirates forward of amidships, where they were making a desperate stand.

At the mercy of wind and wave the two vessels, lashed together, were drifting, for every man had been called to a duty of life and death, and hot and fierce the combat raged.

But steadily the Americans pressed the pirates forward, notwithstanding their chief fought like a demon.

Had it been on his own deck, and backed by the crew that went down with his schooner, the battle would have soon ended; but those of the old band were demoralized by the loss of their vessel, and the new men Don Diablo had with him were not yet accustomed to their chief's mode of desperate warfare, and consequently gave way before the determined onslaught of Howard De Vigne and the few who rallied close around him.

At length, with a wild shout, Captain Marsden and his volunteers joined in the *mêlée*, and with an overwhelming rush the pirates were forced to cry for quarter, or be hurled bodily into the sea, if they escaped death by the swords and pistols of their foes.

Seeing that all was lost, Don Diablo gave a hurried glance shoreward, as though he meditated springing into the sea and again making a bold swim for life; but, as if seeing its uselessness, he wheeled and confronted Howard De Vigne, and their swords crossed, while the chief savagely said:

"Your life or mine, young sir, for I owe this to you."

"Ay, your life or mine, Don Diablo," answered Howard De Vigne, and both men braced themselves for the desperate struggle, when suddenly their swords were struck up, and a pistol was leveled at the head of the pirate chief.

"You are a prisoner, Don Diablo," said Captain Marsden, sternly, and turning to the lieutenant, he continued, quickly:

"De Vigne, you shall not risk your life in a struggle with this fiend; let him die on the gallows as he deserves, for your captain is badly wounded and you are needed."

For a moment Howard De Vigne seemed as if sorry that the encounter had not been allowed to terminate, but realizing the truth of what Captain Marsden said, he answered:

"You are right, sir; Don Diablo, you are my prisoner, sir."

The dark face of the pirate chief showed no sign of emotion, and he made no reply, simply bowing his head in acquiescence of his fate, be what it might.

As Captain Graham had received a severe wound, and but half the Vidette's crew remained in condition to do service, Howard De Vigne determined to sail at once for New York, at the same time hoping that Captain Marsden and Lucille would go as his guests, instead of remaining on the Spanish Queen, which it was deemed best to put back into Havana for repairs and a full complement of seamen.

But Captain Marsden said that important business called him to New Orleans, and, as the packet ship would be detained but a day or two in Havana, he would not desert her, but continue on for the voyage, and thanking the young officer for all he had done for them, the captain returned to the Spanish vessel, and, with a kiss from the tips of his fingers, which was promptly answered by Lucille, the lovers parted, with the hope of meeting again ere long.

Alas! could they but have known when that meeting would be, and under what circumstances, their hopeful hearts would have been filled with bitterness.

CHAPTER IV.

A BITTER BLOW TO BEAR.

LIEUTENANT HOWARD DE VIGNE was in a good humor with himself and the world in general as he paced the quarter-deck of the Vidette, which two days before had dropped anchor in New York harbor, after a long but safe run from the scene of the conflict with the Spanish Queen.

Beneath his decks, in irons, was Don Diablo, the Pirate of the Gulf, and a score or more of his crew, and Captain Graham having had to lose a leg it was not likely that he would resume command once more, and the handsome young officer held hopes of stepping into his superior's shoes, or rather getting under his epaulettes, for by his exertions had the famous corsair been captured.

He had sent his official report to Washington, by special messenger, and was only awaiting orders, when he would ask for leave that he might run up to his home on the Sound, where dwelt his widowed mother. A short visit there, and then a return to New York, where he knew he would meet Lucille, as a letter from her, received on his arrival, had stated that she and her father would soon be in the metropolis.

It was no wonder then that the young lieutenant wore a pleased expression upon his handsome face, and paced the deck with a joyous step.

"There is a shore-boat, sir, coming off, and it has a lady in it," said a midshipman, who had been enjoying the view of the city, and listening to the busy rumble that came off from it on the balmy breeze.

"I see it, and— Why, it is my dear mother; what can have brought her here, I wonder?" cried Howard De Vigne.

"The news of our arrival, sir, was in all the papers, and with Don Diablo on board a prisoner, there are crowds on the shore watching us as though we were a great national curiosity," volunteered the midshipman, pleasantly.

"Doubtless my mother was in the city, and hearing of my arrival, has come out; at any rate, I am delighted to see her," and Lieutenant De Vigne walked to the gangway to receive the one being in the world to him, until he had met Lucille Marsden in Havana.

The meeting between mother and son was most affectionate, though Mrs. De Vigne, a sad-faced, yet still beautiful woman, looked pale and troubled, as her tall, dashing-looking boy, as she called him, led her into the cabin.

"You seem weary and troubled, mother; have a glass of wine, and tell me what is wrong," said the son, kindly, placing his mother upon an easy-chair, and removing her wraps.

She took the wine without a word, and after a moment said sadly:

"Howard, I am weary and troubled—wearied of life, and worried sick by a great heart-trouble."

"My dear mother, you are indeed not well, and I was so in hopes to have you full of joy at my great success, for you know I have won promotion since I have been away, and now expect Government will give me command of the Vidette, even if I do not get my captaincy yet; is not all this good news?"

"Yes, Howard, yet still it is upon the misfortune of another that you rise."

"No, no, mother, for Captain Graham was to be promoted anyhow."

"I do not refer to him, but to—Don Diablo."

"Ha! that vile wretch, that cruel scourge of the seas; yes, I rise on his downfall, I am glad to say."

"Oh, my son! my son!" and the mother buried her face in her hands as if in deepest grief, while her son, unable to account for her strange conduct, looked upon her with anxious eyes.

At last she asked in a whisper:

"Are we alone, Howard?"

"Yes, mother."

"No prying eyes or eager ears to see and hear?"

The lieutenant arose and looked into the two state-rooms in the cabin, and closed the door and locked it that led through into the ward-room.

"Now, mother, we are wholly alone," and he resumed his seat and took her hand.

"Another glass of wine, please, Howard, for I need artificial strength—thank you; now tell me, where is this man whom men call Don Diablo?"

"Below decks in irons; you certainly cannot have an idle curiosity to see one so vile and wretched?"

"No! no! no! I never wish to look upon his face again," gasped the woman.

"Again, mother?" asked Howard De Vigne, in surprise.

"Yes, again, my son, for we have met before."

"Mother, you have never told me of this."

"I hoped I should never have to do so, Howard; but, alas! now I have a bitter, damning confession to make to you, my brave, noble boy, that will bow your head in grief, unless you will do as I wish, and ask no questions of me."

"Why, mother, your words, your manner, are so strange, I fear something has gone wrong with you since I left; come, tell me, has father's investment for you proved worthless, and—"

"No, no, my son; my income is as regular as the day, and I have improved our little home until it is most beautiful; but yesterday a neighbor brought me a paper containing an account of your vessel's arrival, and heralding you as the hero of the sea, for capturing the famous Don Diablo, and that is what has cast a sorrow upon my heart from which I fear I can never recover."

"Mother, tell me what it is that lies between you and this devilish freebooter!" said the son, almost sternly.

"Do as I wish you to do, Howard, and ask me no questions."

"And what is it you wish, mother?"

In a whisper, and leaning toward her son, she said:

"Release this prisoner."

"Never! release this vile wretch, and the request to do so come from my mother?" and Howard De Vigne sprung to his feet in indignant surprise.

"I have asked it, nay, I beg it, I implore that you set Don Diablo free, my son."

"Never!"

"You utterly refuse me, Howard?"

"I must, for I cannot do otherwise."

"You could allow him to escape, and—"

"And be held responsible by my Government; no, mother, the man must swing with his cut-throat followers within the week."

"Never!"

"What, mother?"

"And I say never! that man must not die by your hand, Howard De Vigne," said the lady, almost savagely.

"Great God! Mother, have you lost your reason?" cried the frightened son.

"I wish to Heaven I had; for in madness there is forgetfulness. Listen, my son, as you force me to speak: here, sit just in front of me where I can see your face, and you can see mine, and remember, when you have heard all, that I tried to get you to act without asking me any questions; come, I am ready to sacrifice self, happiness, all, only I want you to hear, and then heed."

She drew him down in front of her, and clasping his hands, said in a low tone, while she looked straight into his eyes:

"Howard, my son, I have deceived you in regard to yourself, for Captain Grey De Vigne was not your father."

The young man turned deadly pale, and his whole form trembled, which showed how great a surprise his mother's confession was to him.

At last he said in a low tone:

"Is this true, mother? Captain Grey De Vigne was not my father?"

"It is the truth, my son; he is in his grave, while your father still lives."

"Oh, God!" and the proud head of Howard De Vigne was buried in his hands in bitter grief at his mother's confession.

CHAPTER V.

THE MOTHER'S CONFESSION.

FOR some moments no word was spoken between mother and son.

The former was calm, for, having made up her mind to tell the bitter story, that lay like a weight of iron upon her heart, she had brought all of her force of will to her command, and was determined not to shrink from the duty.

And her son?

Through his brain flashed thoughts of shame, of crime, of he knew not what, for, from the lips of his own mother he had heard the fatal words, that the man he had ever believed to be his father was in his grave, and there was one yet living who held that kindred tie to him.

"Mother! mother! what does all this mean?" he groaned, after awhile.

"Be calm, my son, and you shall hear all, and then condemn me, if you wish."

She paused, and her voice trembled; but controlling her emotion she went on:

"You know, my son, that I am not an American, but a Mexican, and that my family was one of the oldest in that land of the Gulf."

"My father, a man of vast wealth, dwelt upon the Gulf shores, at his hacienda, and I was his only child, and we were most happy there, until on our return from Havana, where we had been on a visit, our vessel was wrecked by a hurricane, and we were saved from death only by a miracle, being rescued by the commander of an armed vessel."

"He brought us to our home, and being a young man of remarkable powers of fascination, only twenty-two, and one to whom my father took a great fancy, I learned to love him with all my heart, and we became engaged to be married."

"At last the day of my wedding rolled around, and it was made a gala affair by my father, and hundreds of the neighbors were invited to attend; but, as the padre began the service, to make me the wife of the man I loved, there suddenly appeared a young officer in the uniform of the United States Navy, and denounced my intended husband as— Oh, God! my son, how can I speak the words?"

"I am listening, mother, and most deeply interested, I assure you," said the son, in a constrained voice:

With an effort, Mrs De Vigne resumed:

"He denounced the man I loved, the one to whom I was about to be wedded, as, not the Carthaginian officer we believed him to be, but, Don Diablo, the Rover."

With a startled cry, Howard De Vigne sprung to his feet and paced rapidly to and fro several times; but then came back and resumed his seat, and Mrs. De Vigne continued:

"There was a fearful scene, and Don Diablo, for the American had spoken truly, escaped to his boats, and thence to his schooner, after a fight with the man who denounced him, and his crew."

"His vessel being of light draught, he put to sea through an inlet, thus eluding an American vessel-of-war that was coming into the bay to attack him."

"Thus saved by the American officer, I felt deeply grateful to him, and he visited our hacienda as my accepted suitor, for his vessel was cruising in the Gulf."

"Need I say, my son, that Grey De Vigne was that young officer?"

"I half suspected it; and yet he is not my father?"

"No."

"Pray, tell me who is, for the mystery leaves me all at sea."

"Don't be severe, Howard, until you learn all."

"My mother, I humbly crave pardon."

Mrs. De Vigne leaned forward and imprinted a kiss upon his forehead, and went on:

"Ere Don Diablo departed that day he swore to be avenged, and he kept his word, for one day my father disappeared suddenly, and the next I received a letter from the Rover, telling me he had him in his power, and but one thing would save his life—and that was for me to become his wife."

"Howard, my son, I strove hard against my cruel fate, but at last I yielded, as I knew my father would certainly die."

"One night Don Diablo landed upon our coast, and forced Padre Juan to marry us, and I left, a pirate's bride, and I saw my father sent on shore and set free, though he knew not then that I was aboard the outlaw vessel."

"Ah me, Howard, I could not, if I would, tell you of my life on the Buccaneer's Isle, for nearly two long years, the queen of an outlaw band, and loved, in his way, by Don Diablo—"

"And I am his son?" said Howard De Vigne, in a voice of forced calmness, that was most painful to listen to.

"Yes, you were born on the Buccaneer Isle."

"Howard the Devil, is a better name for me then, than Howard De Vigne," he said, with a bitter laugh.

"My son, you have not heard all."

"Nothing can be worse than what I have heard; in fact the edge of my appetite for more news, is worn off, my mother."

"Oh, God! Howard, my poor boy, have you no pity for me?"

"Yes, mother, forgive me; I will listen to all you have to tell."

"It will be soon told, my son; when Grey De

Vigne, to whom I was engaged, learned that I had been captured by Don Diablo, for he knew not the truth, he determined to rescue me, and, being a man of great courage, he decided to fit out a vessel to cruise only against the buccaneer chief."

"My father's wealth furnished the vessel, and getting leave of absence for a year, he started in pursuit of Don Diablo."

"But he found he had set for himself a hard duty to perform, for twice when he met the schooner of the chief he was beaten off with heavy loss, and making a landing on the outlaw isle once, he was driven back, and nearly lost his life and vessel."

"Then he determined to accomplish by strategy, what he could not by force, and going to Havana disguised himself as a common seaman, and with half a score of his crew, watched his chance, and shipped on the schooner of Don Diablo."

"Once in the stronghold he acted secretly and with wonderful tact, made himself known to me, and at last planned our successful escape, one night of storm."

"We left in an open boat, and you were in my arms, and reached Havana in safety."

"But there Don Diablo tracked us, and again would I have fallen into his power, through his spies, had not Grey De Vigne shot the chief down one night, and a second time we escaped."

"Coming to New York he placed me in the care of his friends, not telling them who I was, and then started on a cruise in the Gulf once more, whither he had been ordered."

"Two years after he returned, and told me that Don Diablo had been really killed by him in Havana, and that his lieutenant was still keeping up his name, and spreading terror over the southern seas; and more, he told me that this lieutenant had landed at my home, slain my poor father, and that I was alone in the world, with only you, my child."

"Then it was he begged me to become his wife, and I consented, for what had he not done for me, and did he not overlook the fact that he was marrying a pirate's widow?"

"He certainly was a good man, mother, and I am glad that I have no cause to curse the memory of the man I believed my father."

"And do you blame me, my son?" asked the mother, in a piteous, pleading tone.

"Oh no, my mother; circumstances made your life wretched."

"God bless you, my noble boy; but, Howard, it was only several years after my marriage to Captain De Vigne that we learned that Don Diablo was not dead, and it so worried him that his health began to fail, and at last he died, and you and I were left alone."

"But he had secured for you a midshipman's berth in the navy, and leaving me in comfortable circumstances, I hoped for happiness; but ill-fate sent you to the Gulf, and now, my son, you have captured your own father, and have it in your power to set him free, or let him die on the gallows; which shall it be?"

She gazed earnestly into his face, and he answered in deep, calm tones:

"Mother, if I am dismissed from the navy, Don Diablo shall be set free, for, be he what he may, I will not be the one to bring my father to the gallows."

"God bless you, my noble boy; now I will return home, and when you get leave come to me."

She arose, and almost mechanically he bade her farewell, and aided her into the waiting boat.

Then he returned to the cabin, and ordered that Don Diablo, the prisoner, be brought before him.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CAPTOR AND CAPTIVE.

THE clanking of chains coming down the companionway caused Howard De Vigne to raise his pale face from his hands, as he sat at the cabin table, and fix his burning eyes upon the prisoner.

With upright form, fearless face, and flashing eyes, Don Diablo entered the cabin, and refusing the chair to which the young officer motioned him, folded his manacled hands across his broad breast, and said in his deep tones:

"You sent for me, señor?"

"I did; I desire to speak with you; guards, leave the cabin, and I will call when I need you."

The two marines saluted and departed, and again the lieutenant motioned to the prisoner to be seated; but he refused, and said:

"What little there is for us to converse upon will not detain me long."

"You seem to prefer your dismal quarters to this cabin, as you wish to return there so soon."

"I never grumble at fate, señor."

"You are fortunately constituted; but will you say the same when under the shadow of the gallows?"

"Yes; I will die as I live, without fear," and as the corsair spoke, there was a look upon his face that was strangely like his captor's; in fact, few would have looked upon the two men

and not have been struck with the striking resemblance between them.

The one was yet a youth, for he was but twenty-one, and yet he looked older, for many cares had already fallen upon his young shoulders.

The other was a man of forty-four or five, yet did not look that age within ten years, for not a thread of silver was there in his dark hair, his bronzed face wore no look of care, his eyes were as brightly beautiful as his son's, and the handsome, fascinating face was marred only by the stern and cruel expressions that haunted the mouth.

"You have that one virtue, then, courage?" said the lieutenant.

"Yes, I am no coward, Lieutenant De Vigne."

"Do you know that I am awaiting orders from Washington what to do with you?"

"So I suspected; it matters not to me what be my fate."

"The gallows is a fearful instrument of death."

"I have been so long under its shadow that it holds no terror for me," was the calm rejoinder, and in no manner of bravado was it made.

"Well, you are not to die."

"Indeed! I am to live a life of torture, until I go mad, as a refinement of American cruelty."

"No, you are to be set free."

"Ah! may I ask why this mercy is shown me, and what I am to do in return?" sneered the pirate.

"You are to pledge yourself to leave the United States, and never again set foot on its soil of your own will."

"Why?"

"It matters not; do you so pledge yourself?"

"No, I make no pledges."

"Not even to save your life?"

"No, for now I see that a sickly sentimentality on your part causes you to release me."

"What do you mean?" asked Howard, in surprise.

"Your name is De Vigne, I believe?"

"Yes."

"Your mother was the Señorita Corinne Hildos, a Mexican?"

"Yes."

"I made her my wife, and afterward killed her father; she escaped from my island stronghold with an American officer, who nearly ended my days of usefulness in Havana; but Satan takes care of his own, and I recovered."

"That officer was Captain Grey De Vigne, your supposed father, for I am really your paternal ancestor."

The chief spoke as though he expected to overwhelm the young officer with shame and horror; but he was disappointed, for Howard showed no emotion, and answered quietly:

"I already know that I am the son of a vile wretch, and I set you free, only because I am not myself evil enough to wish your life upon my hands."

"Ah! as I said, sickly sentimentality sets me free; but I care not for the cause, so I go free, boy."

"I saw your mother through the open port as she came out this afternoon, and her face told me that she knew who was in irons on this vessel; well, when do we part company, my son?"

"Do not dare call me by that sacred name, for, though you are my father, I hate and abhor you."

"So be it; what care I? but answer my question," was the reckless reply.

"To-night at eight bells I will take the deck, and the watch, being changed, will not know what visitor may be in the cabin, and I will call a shore boat to come out at two bells and row you ashore, and can give you a disguise that will prevent your recognition by any of the crew that may see you."

"It is a good plan; but you will doubtless be dismissed for your pains."

"Perhaps; but what is that to you?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Very well; I will order you brought to the cabin before midnight, and prepare your disguise in the mean time; do you need money?"

"No, I have a fortune in jewels about me now; here, let me show that I appreciate what you do for one you abhor; wear this ring, and should you ever fall into the hands of any of my Sea League it will protect you—nay, do not refuse it, and remember, should trouble overtake you, and a buccaneer ask you how you received it, answer simply one word—*souvenir*."

Don Diablo took the hand of his son, who mechanically permitted it, and slipped the ring on the little finger of his left hand, where, be its history what it might, it certainly was an ornament, for the design was a pair of solid gold eagle's claws, clasping a ruby of great beauty and size.

With but a glance at the ring, and another at his father, Howard De Vigne turned and called the guards, and the pirate chief was led back below decks.

Then, up and down the cabin paced the young man, his lips set, his eyes blazing, until darkness crept over the waters, when he called a boat and rowed shoreward.

"I will return in a shore-boat, Jasper, so do not wait," he said to the coxswain, and then walked up Broadway into the business part of the city.

Just before midnight he returned to the Vidette, and told the boatman to wait alongside, while he went into the cabin, bearing in his arms a large bundle.

"Mr. Valour, send the Don Diablo to my cabin, please," he said to the officer of the deck, and again, a few moments after, he stood face to face with his father.

At last eight bells struck, and Howard arose and approached the prisoner.

"Here, let me unlock your irons."

Without a word the chief obeyed, and he was free of his chains.

"Now step into my state-room yonder and change your clothing; you will find a disguise, and clothing there; in half an hour come on deck."

As the Vidette's bell tolled half-past twelve, a tall, cloaked form emerged from the cabin and approached the spot where Howard De Vigne stood, and said simply:

"I am ready."

"Then go; here, boatman, row this gentleman to the shore," said Howard.

"Farewell, boy; you have done wrong to set me free; better have hanged me," was the ominous remark of Don Diablo.

"Go!"

Howard De Vigne made no other response, and the chief entered the waiting boat and was pulled rapidly shoreward.

Until the gray dawn was visible over Brooklyn Heights, the unhappy lieutenant paced the deck, weary, heart-hurt, and dreading evil yet to come.

And the sunlight dispelled not the shadows upon him, and with almost joy he welcomed night, for his officers and crew looked strangely upon him when the secret came out that Don Diablo had escaped, and he made no effort to retake him.

At eight bells two boats were seen coming toward the brig-of-war, one of them pulling rapidly, and in quick, terse tones the hail of the officer of the deck was answered:

"I wish to see Lieutenant De Vigne at once."

Into the cabin the man was shown, and Howard recognized an old farmer, a neighbor of his mother's, and saw that his face was pale, and his manner excited.

"Speak, Mr. Frayne; do you bring ill tidings?" he asked, in a hoarse voice.

"Yes, Howard, the worst in the world; your mother is dead."

"Dead! my mother dead! no, this cannot be, for she parted from me yesterday in health."

"True, my poor boy, but this morning I saw a strange boat land at the little pier in front of your home, and a man, wearing a heavy beard, slouch hat, and long cloak, sprung ashore, and entered the cottage."

"Half an hour after I went there, and the boat had gone, and your mother lay dead on the sofa, a knife in her heart."

Howard De Vigne tried to speak, but no words could he utter, and he sunk back in his chair, just as an officer entered.

It was the messenger from Washington, and he said:

"Pardon me, Lieutenant De Vigne, but I am ordered to tell you to come at once to Washington, and bring with you Don Diablo and his crew."

With a low moan of anguish Howard De Vigne dropped his head in his hands, for the blow had fallen bitterly upon him; but the die was cast beyond recall.

CHAPTER VII.

AN INHERITANCE.

It is said that troubles never come singly, and in nine cases out of ten so it seems to happen to verify the old adage; at least so it was in the case of Howard De Vigne, for, broken-hearted almost at the death of his mother, whom he could not doubt fell by the hand of Don Diablo, the young officer had ordered another to take the prisoners to Washington, while he went to his desolate cottage home, to perform the last rites over her whom he had so well loved.

But, hardly had she grown cold in her grave, on the shores of Long Island Sound, when there came from Washington a peremptory dismissal from the service, for aiding Don Diablo to escape, for it was proven that he had himself sent him ashore in a boat, but for what reason could not be discovered, as the young man offered no explanation of his strange conduct, for that secret he determined to carry in his own heart.

With his mother dead, the knowledge that she had died by the hand of Don Diablo, and that that pirate chief was his father, added to his being disgraced by dismissal from the navy, in which he had so hoped to rise to distinction, it was almost more than human nature could bear; but he bravely determined to bear up against all adversity, and once more seek service upon the sea, until one day, some weeks after his mother's death, as he sat in his room at a hotel in New York, he read an account of the loss of the Blue Wave, a packet ship from New Orleans to New York, with all on board.

In bitter agony of spirit he cried:

"Oh, God! what have I done to be so stricken with grief?"

"Poor, poor Lucille, here is your last letter, telling me that, as your father was compelled to start by stage at once for Washington, you would sail on the Blue Wave."

"Alas! alas! and I had intended telling you all, and had you turned against me, knowing who I was, then would life have been unbearable; but with you living I could live down sorrow and misfortune."

"Alas! with you dead, I am reckless of what happens—Ha! who is it that intrudes?" and at a loud knock at his door the unhappy young man arose and opened it.

"Lieutenant De Vigne, I believe," said a stout gentleman with spectacles.

"My name is De Vigne, sir, but I hold no rank, having been dismissed from the navy," he replied, bitterly.

"There are happy men, sir, out of the navy, I can assure you, so you need not despond; but I heard of your misfortune, sir, and a strange affair indeed that you should aid the escape of Don Diablo; but you know your own business best."

"Then why trouble me, sir?" was the curt retort.

"Ah! I see, I should have made known my business, for it is important; I am a lawyer, sir, a lawyer, and I do not transact business in hallways."

"Then walk in, if you have anything to say to me; you doubtless wish me to sue Spain for the price offered for Don Diablo's head; but I will tell you I care not for blood-money."

"Nothing further from my thoughts, sir, though as you suggest it, I believe the money could be recovered, as you certainly did capture him; but they would contend that you—"

"D— it, sir, what is your business with me?" cried Howard, angrily, losing all patience with the fussy little gentleman.

"As I said, sir, as I said, I am a lawyer, sir, a lawyer—"

"You are a chattering old idiot, sir, and if you do not leave my room I will—"

"No, no, lieutenant, I mean *Mister De Vigne*, you will do nothing rash, for I have come to make you a rich man."

"I care not for money, sir."

"But you must, my dear sir, you must in this case, for an inheritance has been left you."

"Bah! you are mad."

"Not so mad as I look, sir, for I hold in my possession twenty thousand dollars left you by a relative of your father."

Howard started, and said, quickly:

"A relative of my father; what do you mean?"

"He had an aunt, an old maid, and she died several days ago; I was her lawyer, sir, her lawyer, and, after giving much to charity, she left twenty thousand to you, and it is in the bank."

"Give it to her other kin, then."

"No, no, the will expressly says it goes to you, to you, sir, and I have called upon you to explain matters, and hand you this check for it, sir; it is on the City Bank, as you see, and I only wish your receipt for the same."

Mechanically Howard took the check, his heart too full of grief to feel any pleasure at his inheritance, and while he looked at it the fussy little fat lawyer wrote a receipt, which was signed with the same air of indifference.

"Your fortune does not please you, sir, does not please you."

"It is a matter of utter indifference to me; what shall I do with the money?"

"My dear sir, live on it, invest it, and double it; that is the way to do; if you don't, I will return your compliment, and say you are mad," and he added, *sotto voce*, "I faith I believe he is; his troubles have made him a lunatic."

"All right, Mister—"

"Dean, sir, lawyer Dean, Mordecai Dean, Esquire, sir, at your service," and the lawyer bowed.

"All right, lawyer Dean, accept my thanks for the interest you have taken in this matter, and please invest the money in a monument for the dear old lady who has, in dying, remembered so unworthy a person as myself."

"The monument is arranged for, sir, all arranged for; she drew the plans herself, sir, and it is to be of purest marble, and she left the money to erect it."

"Then how much do I owe you, sir?"

"Not a cent, sir, not a cent, for the estate pays me."

"Then I will say good-morning, sir."

The lawyer took the hint, and, when left alone, Howard De Vigne broke into a bitter laugh, and muttered:

"I cared not to take this money, but it was forced upon me; ha! I will invest it this night, and losing it will give me the excitement I crave."

"Yes, I will gamble it away."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LUCK-STONE.

It was a blustering, chilly evening in March, and the flickering street-lamps cast dancing

shadows upon the walls, and the searching wind caused wayfarers to draw their cloaks more closely around their forms, or if they were beggars, hoping for a penny, to crouch more closely in the nooks of the houses for shelter.

Yet one person seemed to heed little the elements, as he strode along Park Row, at that time becoming one of the fashionable quarters of the city.

As if searching for some particular place, he kept his eyes upon the different doors, until he came to an entrance, upon either side of which were two lamps, upon the glass globes of which, in gilded letters, was painted:

"TEMPLE OF FORTUNE."

"This is the place where I came one night, two years ago, with poor Knox, who lost his last dollar, and then blew his brains out in the presence of those who had ruined him.

"If I do the same—well, who will care?"

He had paused, as he muttered the above sad story; but once more he moved on, passing upstairs into an ante-room, the walls of which were rows of closets.

In the center of the room sat a man at a table, and in his hands were a number of ivory buttons, with numbers marked on them.

"Leave your cloak and cane, sir?" asked the man, politely, seeing that he addressed a gentleman, and a stranger to the place.

"Yes, thank you," and receiving an ivory button, with the number of the closet in which was deposited his things, the visitor passed on through a door into a large and magnificent saloon.

It was a room of vast size, the walls having painted upon them rare pictures and the ceiling colored blue, and dotted with gilded stars to resemble the heavens at night.

A row of billiard-tables, surrounded by players, occupied the center of the room, and upon one side was a marble bar, glittering with glassware, and with the decanters full of choice wines and liquors.

In alcoves, upon the other side of the room, were card-tables, also occupied by players, and at the extremities of the grand saloon was a roulette table and faro table.

For a moment the stranger seemed dazed by the gorgeous scene; but spying the roulette table, walked in that direction.

There were several persons around it, and behind it a man flashily attired, who was the keeper, and held in his hand the little ivory ball to snap in the wheel of polished brass.

He merely glanced up as the stranger entered, and said curtly:

"Do you play, sir?"

"Yes," and he placed a bank-note upon a number on the table.

"All set!" cried the keeper, snapping the ivory ball into the wheel and setting it turning at the same time.

"Single O, black!" called out the keeper, as the wheel stopped in front of that number.

"You risked a large sum, and you have lost, sir," said the gambler, coolly, as with a little ivory rake he drew the money toward him.

The player made no reply, and again deposited his money upon a number.

And again he lost.

And thus it went on, the stranger losing at each turn of the wheel, and yet the color coming into his face, instead of its growing paler.

Once fickle fortune turned suddenly in his favor, and he won back a thousand dollars; but the next turn of the wheel and he again lost.

And again, and again, luck held aloof from him, until players less interested, and risking much smaller stakes, crowded round the table, and gazed upon him with looks of surprise at the indifference he showed in losing so heavily.

"All set! do you cover a number, sir?" asked the keeper.

"No, for I have just lost the last of twenty thousand dollars, and have no more money with me," was the cool reply.

"I will advance you a thousand on that ring, sir," said the keeper, pausing with the ivory ball in his fingers, and ready to turn the wheel for the other players.

"Ha! I had forgotten this; I will place it here," and he placed the valuable and unique ring upon the table, while he muttered, half aloud, in a sneering way:

"A fitting way to get rid of the present of my illustrious father."

"Double O, red!" sung out the keeper in his drawling tone, though his face flushed as he added:

"The ring is a luck-stone, sir; what was it I offered to loan you on it?"

"A thousand dollars!" cried a number of voices in chorus, for they were not sorry to see the bank lose, as often before it had swallowed up their gold.

"Then I owe you thirty thousand dollars, sir; twelve thousand more than you lost," and while the keeper was counting out the money for the indifferent player, the news of the strange playing spread through the room, and scores of men crowded anxiously around the table.

"Do you still play, sir?"

"Yes," was the quiet response, and the player placed the ring upon the double O, black.

"It goes as a thousand dollars?"

"Yes."

"All set!" cried the keeper, and all eyes eagerly watched the revolving wheel, and a murmur went round the crowd as again the ring won.

"I'll give you five thousand dollars for that ring, sir," said the keeper.

"I place it on single O, black, at a thousand," was the cold response, and once more it won.

And, with a strange smile upon his face, which no one present could read, the player again risked his ring upon each number on the table, and each time was a winner, until he at last turned away with a fortune in his hands, and with a bow to the keeper left the saloon.

At the anteroom a person overtook him, and said quickly:

"Pardon me, sir, but will you sell that ring?"

"No, sir."

"I will give you ten thousand dollars for it, though it is not worth more than two thousand."

"I will not sell it, sir; it is an heirloom from one whom I hate most devoutly," and the stranger passed on, while the one who had addressed him muttered:

"If he were ten years older, I would swear he was Don Diablo, for he is strangely like him in face and form; anyhow, I will follow and find out who and what he is, for just such a man I want, as I never saw such cool playing, both when he lost and won a fortune."

The speaker was a man of thirty-five, with a fine face, an athletic, though slender form, and a resolute, daring air.

He was dressed in a kind of undress uniform, and looked like one who would be a deadly foe, or truly friend.

Buttoning his pea-jacket closer around him, he strode from the gambling hall, and followed on the steps of Howard De Vigne.

CHAPTER IX.

THE INSULT AND THE CHALLENGE.

"IN God's name! what have I to live for?"

"My mother murdered by the very man whose life she saved, and by my father; myself dismissed from the service I so loved, and Lucille dead; truly, mine is an unhappy lot—ha! I found excitement and forgetfulness in one vice for several hours, I will go in here, and drown thought in the wine cup."

The speaker was Howard De Vigne, and that his sorrows and troubles had driven him nearly to desperation the reader can readily surmise by his words.

The place he entered was a brilliantly-lighted gentlemen's restaurant, also combining a billiard-room and enticing bar.

It was on Fulton street, and the resort of the fashionable swells, young and old, of that day, for I am writing of the early years of the present century.

At the gorgeous bar, a number of young men were standing, sipping their wine, or cocktails, according to their tastes, and walking up to one side of the group Howard De Vigne called for a bottle of champagne.

As he poured out the first glass, a young man entered the saloon and was hailed by the group, whom he at once joined, while one asked in a tone of drawing affectation:

"Where have you been, dear boy? Dancing, flirting, or gambling?"

"I have been watching an intensely interesting game, played by that young naval officer De Vigne, who, you remember, was lately dismissed from the service, for aiding the pirate Don Diablo to escape."

This response seemed to deeply interest all, and the words caught the ear of Howard himself.

"De Vigne gambling! why I thought fighting was his only enjoyment, and never heard of his gambling; are you sure about the man, Valour?"

"Oh, yes, for several there knew him; he first lost twenty thousand dollars, and then staked a luck-stone for so much cash, and won on every number on which he placed it; it was grand, I assure you, and he left off a cool fifty thousand winner."

"Why De Vigne is poor; that is he had only his pay, and I begin to believe what has been whispered about him," said the young man who had said that the dismissed officer was not known before to gamble.

"And what is said of him?" asked all, in chorus, anxious for a bit of gossip, as men often are, though they attribute that vice wholly to the fair sex.

"Well, it has been said that Don Diablo had with him large sums of money, and also jewels of great value, and, if De Vigne lost twenty thousand dollars gambling, I believe the pirate chief paid him well for his freedom."

It was an unlucky speech, for with the last word, the speaker staggered back with a glass of wine dashed full in his face, while the deep, angry voice of Howard De Vigne said, sternly:

"You are a lying cur, Mark Manly."

At once all was a scene of intense excitement, and, as soon as the young man, Mark Manly, could wipe the wine from his eyes with his silk

handkerchief, he sprung forward, his face white with rage, as he saw who had so insulted him.

But with a quick blow, straight out from the shoulder, Howard De Vigne laid him upon his back, and then, as the others seemed half-inclined to attack him, he stood at bay, and, seeing that they did not know him, said calmly:

"Gentlemen, I am Howard De Vigne, and I warn you off."

The words and manner of the young sailor created a profound impression, and mingled with the curious glances of the crowd was admiration at his splendid physique and handsome face, as he coolly stood before them, quiet in manner, but with a dangerous look in his eyes.

Having risen to his feet, half-stunned, Mark Manly seemed anxious to again attack his adversary, but was held back by his friends, while others in the crowd urged him on, when Howard said, calmly:

"If Mr. Manly wishes to push this affair with me there is a better way of settling our trouble than by a fight in a public saloon."

"Yes, and you shall hear from me, sir, at once; Loyd Defoe, will you act for me?" cried Mark Manly, turning to the young man who had unintentionally caused the trouble, by bringing the news of Howard's gambling.

"Oh, yes, Mark, with pleasure; if you refer me to your friend, sir, we can soon arrange the little matter," was the rather cheerful reply.

Howard looked round upon the crowd, and into his eyes came momentarily a hunted look, such a look as I have seen upon a man's face when he was condemned to die and faced his executioners; but this turned to an expression of deep sadness, as he said with a faint attempt at a smile:

"I am sorry, sir, but I have not a friend in the world."

A murmur of sympathy at his words ran through the crowd; but it was hushed when a man forced his way forward, and said in a clear, distinct voice:

"Pardon me, Mr. De Vigne, but allow me to act as your friend in this affair; my name is Captain Jack Waldron, and I am a sailor by profession, and from love of the sea."

Howard readily held forth his hand, for he saw in the person before him the one who had made him the liberal offer for the ruby ring in the ante-room of the gambling saloon, and there was that in his face and general air that told him he need not seek a better friend.

"I thank you, sir; Mr. Manly, I am at the Washington House, where your friend can find me," and again turning to Captain Jack Waldron, he said, pleasantly:

"Let us have a bottle of wine together, and then we will leave."

Chatting pleasantly together, the two drank their wine, and then arm in arm left the saloon, followed by the eyes of all who had witnessed the insulting words of Mark Manly, and their prompt punishment.

"Well, Mr. De Vigne, is this an old grudge?" asked Captain Waldron, as the two took seats in Howard's pleasant room.

"Oh, no, and yet it may be, for Manly is a great admirer of a young lady whom I met in Havana, and followed her there, and was refused by her for his pains, and I think he never forgave me for it; ah me! the poor girl is dead now, as she went down on the Blue Wave some weeks ago."

"Ah! I heard of the loss of that vessel; it was indeed a sad affair; but, Mr. De Vigne, as the challenged party, what weapons do you prefer?"

"Either swords or pistols, it matters not which."

"You are proficient in the use of both of them?"

"Oh, yes, I am, or rather was a naval officer; but I fear I put you to a great deal of trouble for me, a stranger to you."

"I am a stranger to no man in misfortune, sir, and though I did not know who you were to-night, when you were at the Temple of Fortune, trying your luck, I had heard of you and your troubles, and in them you have my full sympathy."

"And from my heart I thank you, sir; I visited the Temple of Fortune for excitement, as I afterward went into the saloon to drown thought in a glass of wine."

"You certainly have had excitement enough for one night, especially with this duel upon your hands."

"I am glad of it for the excitement it will bring."

"Well, only be as cool as you were to-night when losing, and winning, and you will come out victor; but I have heard of Manly as a man of great nerve, and one who has already sent a couple of men to the grave."

"So be it; if he sends me there, he will do me a favor, and—"

A knock came upon the door, and a hall-boy entered with a card.

Howard De Vigne took it quietly and read aloud:

"Loyd Defoe."

"Show him up, please," he said to the servant, and soon after the young gentleman, al-

ready known to the reader, entered the room, and said politely:

"Lieutenant De Vigne, I believe?"

"I am Mister De Vigne, sir, as I hold no rank in the navy, having been dismissed, as you know; but permit me to introduce you to my friend, Captain Waldron, who will arrange any matters with you that you may desire on the part of Mr. Manly, from whom I surmise you come."

"I do, sir," and bowing to Captain Waldron, or Jack Waldron, as he said he preferred to be called by his intimates, Loyd Defoe took a seat, while Howard excused himself and left the room.

A short while after he returned to find Defoe gone, and the captain quietly smoking.

"Well, De Vigne, it is all arranged; swords to be the weapons used, though pistols are to be also taken to the field; time, to-morrow afternoon at sunset, on the Burr and Hamilton dueling-field in Jersey, and each party, if desired, to have a surgeon along."

"I am content; now be my guest for the night."

"Thank you, but I cannot, as I have a little family expecting me, and it is now after midnight."

"A family! If I had thought that—"

"Yes, yes, but don't worry yourself, for they are all grown, and they are as fine a set of fellows, on as fine a little schooner, as ever floated, and I'll offer you a berth on board to prove it; but good-night," and Captain Jack Waldron disappeared, while Howard said half aloud:

"There is some strange mystery about that man; dressed in half-uniform, yet not in the navy; a trim schooner and gallant set of men under him—it looks strange—it looks indeed strange."

CHAPTER X.

ON THE FIELD OF HONOR.

AN hour before sunset, upon the day following the scenes related in the foregoing chapter, a carriage crossed the ferry between New York and Jersey, and drove rapidly along the road leading along the western bank of the majestic Hudson river.

Reaching a point from whence a grand view of the river could be seen, one of the occupants called to the driver to lower the top, that they could the better see the magnificent panorama spread out before them.

As the top of the barouche was thrown back it displayed three persons seated within, two of whom were Howard De Vigne and Captain Waldron, and the third a gray-haired, soldierly-looking individual, who had been presented as Doctor Lane, the surgeon of the captain's vessel.

"There goes a sloop yacht, creeping along under the land, and it must contain our friends," said Captain Waldron, pointing below them, to a tiny craft that was heading in toward the Jersey shore.

"Yes, I recognize Mark Manly at the tiller; it is his vessel doubtless, as I have heard he owned a yacht, but he does wrong to take the tiller when he is to risk his life upon his hand's steadiness; why, if we were going to use pistols, the strain on the muscles would wholly unfit him for good aim," said Howard De Vigne.

"You are right, sir; his second should not permit it; go on, driver, for we wish to arrive on the field first, for that is half the battle, to get your enemy nervous by seeing that you are waiting for him; eh, doctor?"

"True, captain; it goes a long way toward unnerving a man, though I doubt if it would affect Mr. De Vigne here as he is as unconcerned as he could be; in fact, in the dozen duels I have attended professionally, I never saw a man with such a nerve of iron."

"Thank you, doctor; but it is, perhaps, because I hold life at a discount and death at a premium."

"Not so should you, though, De Vigne; there is room enough in this world for all good men, and in these times one can make a name for himself that will bring him honor; but here we are, for the driver halts," and Captain Waldron sprung lightly out of the vehicle, and was quickly followed by Howard and the surgeon.

It was the same spot where Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton met years before, and a scene rendered famous by the latter's fall, and where many a deadly encounter has since occurred; but, unmindful of the life blood the sod had drank up in the past, and the sad act that was to be there perpetrated, the little birds hopped merrily around upon the grass, or trilled their notes from the branches of surrounding trees.

Hardly had the swords been laid out ready for use, and a case of pistols placed near, when voices were heard coming up the hill, and soon after four forms appeared in sight.

"It is Manly, and Defoe, his surgeon and his valet are with him," said Howard, quietly.

"They seem to think they are coming to a picnic," growled the surgeon, as he unrolled his surgical implements, wiping them off as tenderly as though they were of gold.

"They may not go back in the same jolly strain," remarked Captain Jack Waldron, and, as they approached, laughing gayly, he raised his hat politely, as did also Howard.

That Mark Manly had been drinking was evident, from his flushed face; yet he seemed not at all nervous, and the preliminaries were soon arranged, the principals threw aside their coats and took their stands, and Defoe and the captain stood ready to hand them the weapons.

But suddenly a shriek was heard, and up to the spot, on horseback, dashed a young girl, who, drawing rein, threw herself to the ground between the two adversaries, crying wildly:

"No! no! no! this must not be."

She was a woman, and yet a child in years, with a face of rare beauty, and a form of exquisite mold, and which her dark-green riding-habit had set off to perfection.

By her rapid ride her hair had been shaken loose, and hung in golden masses far below her waist, while, as she knelt between the two men, a hand outstretched toward either, to keep them apart, she made a picture that was beautiful, yet touching to look upon.

Howard De Vigne's face changed color at once, and he glanced inquiringly toward his enemy, who said angrily:

"Magdalene, what means this strange and unwarranted intrusion?"

"Mark, forgive me, but I felt that something was wrong, and finding the paper you hid from me this morning, I read of your trouble, and knew what would follow."

"Oh, Mark! Mark! let this end here, I implore you."

"Magdalene, you are a silly child; I could no more stop this duel than I could stem Niagara's torrent, nor would I do so if I could. Here, I'll aid you to mount and then return to your home."

"I will not go, Mark," she said, firmly.

"But I say you must," he retorted, with anger.

But, unheeding him, she cried pleadingly, now turning to Howard De Vigne, and still upon her knees, clasping her hands:

"Oh, sir, please, for the love of God! do not break my heart."

Howard was deeply moved, and said in a voice that trembled:

"It does not rest with me, lady; but if Mr. Manly desires to drop the matter, I will—"

"But Mr. Manly does not desire, nor will he drop the matter," was the quick reply of that person.

Howard simply bowed, and then the woman cried, turning again to her lover, for such he evidently was:

"Mark, you will let this end here, for my sake, for the sake of our—"

"No, not for the sake of all the angels in heaven! Rise, Magdalene, and I will escort you to my yacht, if these gentlemen will pardon the delay."

"Willingly," said Howard, while Captain Waldron bowed.

"No, no, I will remain here; but you, sir, who have the name of being brave and noble, will spare his life?" and she turned again to Howard, in whose eyes she read an assent to her request, for she instantly arose and retreated backward a few steps.

"Perhaps, under existing circumstances, this affair had better be postponed," said Captain Waldron, looking toward Loyd Defoe.

"I will consult Mr. Manly, sir."

"There is no need of a postponement; we came here to fight, and not be stayed by a woman's tears and entreaties," was the rude retort of Mark Manly.

"As you please, sir; it was to spare a worse scene to the lady's eyes that I made the suggestion; we are ready, though I wish it were otherwise," curtly replied the captain.

"And so are we," and Loyd Defoe again stepped forward, while Mark Manly once more turned to the woman he had called Magdalene, and said:

"Do you still insist upon remaining?"

"Yes, why can I not face a danger that you must meet, Mark?"

"Because this is no sight for a woman's eyes."

"It is no deed for men's hands; but I will say no more, only kiss me, Mark, for, oh! I have such a foreboding here," and she pressed her hand upon her heart, while, noticing the sudden pallor of his principal's face, Loyd Defoe said, quickly:

"I beg of you not to unnerve Mr. Manly at such a time."

"Forgive me, and, Mark—" she could say no more, but threw her arms around his neck and kissed him, passionately.

But the arms suddenly released their hold, and she would have sunk to the ground, had not Doctor Lane sprung quickly forward and caught her.

"Poor child, she has fainted," he said, with sympathy.

"It is better so; now let the affair go on," replied Loyd Defoe.

But Howard De Vigne whispered something to Captain Waldron, who turned to Loyd Defoe, and said:

"My principal very generously suggests that

after such a scene, Mr. Manly should have a little time to recover himself."

All looked up surprised, while Mark Manly responded, looking toward his second:

"Mr. Manly is thankful to Mr. De Vigne, but is fully capable of taking care of himself, and is ready now for the business on hand."

"He shall be gratified," sneered Captain Jack Waldron, handing his sword to Howard De Vigne, while Loyd Defoe placed a weapon in the hand of Mark Manly, and the two blades, at a word from the captain, met with a vicious clash.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DUEL.

THAT both Howard De Vigne and Mark Manly felt that they had no child's play before them to save their lives was evident, before half a dozen passes had been made, and, seeing them so equally matched, the lookers-on became more deeply interested, forgetting the poor girl who lay upon the mossy bank where Captain Waldron had placed her in an unconscious state.

But the faint seemed but momentary with her, for while the duel was at its height, with an effort she aroused herself, and still half crouching, half lying upon the ground, watched the thrilling combat with an intensity of emotion that was plainly depicted in her beautiful face.

"Thank God! he keeps his promise made me with his eyes," she murmured, as she saw Howard De Vigne distinctly let an unguarded moment of Mark Manly's pass without taking advantage of it, and which act brought an angry exclamation from Captain Waldron.

That Howard was fighting wholly on the defensive was soon evident, and it caused his adversary to press him harder, and be less cautious of himself, for several times he left his heart exposed to a thrust, which was not taken advantage of by his enemy.

Thus for several minutes the sword battle continued, and then, while Mark Manly seemed to weary, the long-tried muscles and hardened frame of Howard De Vigne seemed to grow stronger, and Loyd Defoe seeing it, quickly called a rest, and the two men lowered their weapons, neither having yet drawn a drop of blood.

A moment to catch breath, and again the blades crossed, and from the first clash all saw that Howard determined to press his adversary to the wall, figuratively speaking, for he fought with increased skill, and seemed untiring, while Mark Manly realized that he possessed more endurance than he did.

Presently, and when few expected it, Howard caught the other blade upon his own, and, by a skillful turn of the wrist, sent it flying through the air, where it fell, twenty feet away, and stuck up in the ground within reach of the crouching girl, who all now noticed had recovered consciousness.

"I give you your life, sir," said Howard, quietly, lowering his sword-point from the other's heart.

"And I decline such a favor at the hands of a man who was bribed to release a pirate," hotly retorted Mark Manly, driven to madness by his defeat.

"As you please, sir," and Howard De Vigne glanced anxiously over to where Magdalene stood, and who had heard all.

At his look she came forward, and said entreatingly:

"Oh, Mark! do not press this matter further."

"Hush, Magdalene! I demand another meeting, and with pistols," was the savage reply, and again Howard looked toward the woman, who said despondently:

"I can ask no more, sir; I thank you for what you did do; farewell, Mark," and she turned away with a face full of anguish, and walked slowly toward the river-bank, her cup of bitterness full to the brim.

The seconds now held a consultation, and, out of respect for the woman, and his principal being victor, Captain Waldron tried to effect a parting without a second meeting, and, to his credit be it said, Loyd Defoe also urged it; but Mark Manly was persistent, and demanded a meeting with pistols, which at last was agreed upon.

The weapons were then taken from their cases, and carefully loaded, and the ten paces decided upon were carefully measured off, while Mark Manly paced to and fro, with nervous, angry tread, a scowl upon his brow, and Howard De Vigne, seemingly indifferent, stood quietly gazing in admiration upon the beautiful scene.

Some distance off Magdalene had halted, and was looking back, as if dreading to see the meeting, yet unwilling to fly from the fatal spot.

A toss for word fell upon Captain Waldron, and, in quick, quarter-deck tones, he called out, as soon as the principals stood facing each other, the pistols in their hands:

"Gentlemen, are you ready?"

A dead silence gave consent, and then followed, tersely:

"Fire! One—two—"

The word *two* was drowned in the discharge,

and the weapon of Howard De Vigne dropped from his hand, shivered by the shot of Mark Manly; but half a second before its bullet had gone forth on its life-search, and had cut its way into the broad breast of the man who had demanded a second meeting, and who sprang into the air, and fell in his tracks without a groan, while a loud shriek burst from the lips of poor Magdalene.

Springing to the side of Howard De Vigne, whose hand was benumbed by the shock, Captain Waldron cried:

"Bravo! you have done for him, and your strong grasp on the pistol saved you—let me see! yes, a scratch or two on your hand, but no damage done; come, if we wish to see the reflection of the setting sun upon the city, from the Hoboken Heights, we must be off."

"No, not yet, for I wish to see about this poor girl; for her sake, I hope he is not dead," said Howard, sadly.

"He is on the verge of it, sir," said the surgeon who had accompanied Mark Manly.

"Then hasten back to the city with him, doctor, and give him every attention; quick, I implore you! for there's hope while there's life," cried Magdalene, pleadingly.

"I will at once remove him to the yacht; come, Defoe, you and the servant aid me."

And the wounded man was gently raised in their arms, just as there approached a party of four men, one of whom asked, gruffly:

"Who was it that fought that duel?"

"I am one of the parties, sir; what is your business with me?" coolly said Howard.

"I arrest you, sir, in the name of the law, for a murder committed on Jersey soil."

"Hold, sir!" and Captain Waldron sprang forward, evidently determined to resist; but Howard De Vigne waved him back, and said, calmly:

"Stay, captain; let the officer do his duty; I submit myself as your prisoner, sir."

"No, no, do not arrest him, for he spared Mark's life once, and it was forced upon him to fight the second time," cried Magdalene, suddenly rushing back from the slowly retreating party going toward the river.

"Law is law, ma'am, and I have to do my duty if the heavens tumble; sorry I am, but it's law," and the constable again turned to Howard, who said, in a sad tone, to the maiden:

"For your sake I hope that Manly will not die."

"Alas! I fear there is little hope; farewell!" and she bounded away after the retiring party.

"Poor gal, I guess she's some sweetheart o' that gay young Manly's, who won't be much loss if he does die; but, then, law is law, sir, and I have to hold you," said the constable.

"Very well, I am in your hands; take me where you will."

"Twill be to jail, sir."

"As you please, sir; I care not."

"You'll not remain there long, shipmate," was the low whisper of Captain Waldron, as he and his surgeon turned to pick up the weapons, preparatory to a return to the city.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MIDDY'S MISSION.

"THERE'S a wisiter ter see yer, sir; looks like one o' ther navy middies," and the jailer put his head in at the iron-studded door that guarded Howard De Vigne from the outer world.

For two nights and days he had been in prison, and, as dueling was growing unfashionable, and there was a chance to make an example of one who had committed so heinous a crime as to set free the noted pirate, Don Diablo, it was whispered around that very summary New Jersey justice would be dealt out to Howard De Vigne.

"Show the gentleman in, jailer; if it is not against the rules," said Howard.

"Oh! it's ag'in' ther rules, sir; but yer see the young gentleman was so enticing, and the boss is away, so I couldn't resist him," and the man motioned to some one to approach from the other end of the hall, and the next moment he ushered into the cell, for it was nothing more, a slight form, enveloped in a heavy cloak.

Howard saw the youth extend his hand to the jailer, and say in a low voice:

"There is the twin of the other; now leave us alone."

"Well, sir, I am sorry I have no opportunity to be hospitable to one who is good enough to visit me in these wretched quarters," said Howard, turning to his visitor, and he gazed upon him, while in vain he tried to recall where they had met before, for the face of the midshipman was certainly familiar.

"I do not expect to remain long, sir, and only came to say that here are implements with which you can file the bars of your window, and then gain easy access to the yard—"

"But, my dear sir—"

"Hear me, please; in the north-east corner of the yard, you will find a rope hanging over the high wall, and, as you are a sailor, you can easily climb the thirty feet to the top, and on the other side you will meet one who will guide you to his boat, that will carry you to New York, where you will be safe."

"Pardon me, but though I owe you, a stran-

ger, thanks for your kindness to me, I care not to fly from any fate that awaits me," said Howard, firmly.

"But you must, for you have done nothing that you should suffer like a murderer for."

"Then Mark Manly is dead?"

"No, thank God! On the contrary, there is a ray of hope."

"If he lives there can be nothing done with me."

"But why remain here in a felon's cell?"

"I am indifferent to my fate."

"But you should not be; the world is large, and there are many fields on which you can win a name; come, I have risked much to aid you, and do not refuse me; quick! for time passes rapidly," and the midshipman seemed nervous at the delay.

"May I ask who it is that thus serves me?" and, in the dim light, Howard tried to get a better view of the face of his visitor.

"I am one who wishes you well, and sympathizes with you in your misfortunes and sorrows, for I too have known deep grief."

"Ha! now I recognize your voice; you are not a midshipman, but—"

"Who?" and the head was bowed as if in confusion.

"The one whom Mark Manly called Magdalene."

"Yes, you have penetrated my disguise; I am Magdalene Fielding, the—but never mind who, or what I am; you saved Mark when I asked it, and I have forgiven you for what you were forced to do, and, as he is in a fair way to recover, the surgeon says, I have determined to aid you, though, had he died, I would have done the same; here! take this package of files, and promise me you will leave this dismal place."

"I promise, and, from my heart I thank you, fair girl," said Howard, with deep feeling.

"Now a weight of iron is off my heart; farewell."

She grasped his hand quickly, and turning, sprang out of the door, just as she heard the jailer's footsteps approaching to warn her away.

Glancing in to see that his prisoner was safe, the keeper bolted the door, and Howard heard him pass out through the corridor, and at once set to work to free himself, for though he cared little what happened to him, he had promised the maiden he would effect his escape and intended to keep his word.

The files were new, and the iron old and rusty, and it did not take long to remove a couple of the bars that crossed the window, and taking his cloak he quickly leaped to the ground and sought the corner of the yard described.

Feeling along the wall his hand touched the rope, and, with an agility learned by long practice, he went up, hand over hand to the top, and found that it was made fast to a tree on the other side.

Springing into the branches he quickly descended to the ground, where he was confronted by a muffled figure, who said, gruffly:

"Are you Mr. De Vigne?"

"Yes."

"Then I have orders to put you on the New York shore."

"I will follow; lead on!"

Around the wall of the jail the two went, and after a walk of a few minutes reached the shore, where, in a small inlet, lay a boat.

"Get in, sir," said the boatman, and Howard obeyed; but, as he took his seat in the stern, there suddenly darted into the inlet a large boat filled with men.

To attempt to fly was useless; to resist would have been madness, and Howard De Vigne and his guide remained quiet as they were, while a stern voice, in a low tone, said:

"Well! who have we here?"

"I should know that voice! You are Captain Waldron?" remarked Howard.

"Ay, ay, sir; and you are—"

"Howard De Vigne."

"Bless God!" and as the two boats were now side by side the captain grasped the hand of De Vigne and cried:

"The very man I was going after; do you see these gallant lads? Well, they were to back me in tearing down that old jail and taking you out; come, into my boat, and let us away."

"Ah! Captain, I fear you were going to get yourself into trouble on my account."

"Don't mention it; but how in the name of the saints did you escape?"

"A friend aided me; and you, my man, I will not need now, so here is a souvenir for you," and Howard thrust into the boatman's hand a large piece of gold.

"And what shall I say to the midshipman, sir?"

"Tell him that I am safe; good-night! Now, Captain Waldron, which way?"

"To my vessel, for I took the liberty of going to your hotel this afternoon and paid your bill and got your luggage."

"But when do you sail?"

"To-night."

"Ah, me, I know not what to do."

"Don't talk that way, De Vigne; cheer up, for the world's before you, the accursed past behind you."

"Have you no desire to live to accomplish some end—love—revenge, or—"

"By Heaven! Jack Waldron, you have struck it!" cried Howard De Vigne, with sudden eagerness, and he continued in eager tones that showed by the quivering of his voice how deeply he was moved:

"There is one thing I have to live for, and you have struck the right key; it is *revenge*! ay, there is one I will hunt down to kill, for there is no one now to beg mercy for him."

"Bravo! now we'll board my vessel and set sail."

"But in what service are you, captain?" asked Howard, and the old suspicion came back to him.

"Oh, I have served under several flags; was once in the Greek service; then tried the Buenos Ayrean, and am now in the—but never mind, I'll show you my flag when we board my schooner; give way, lads!"

The oars fell in the water, and after a pull of half an hour the boat ran alongside of a schooner, lying at anchor a little to the south of Gibbet Island.

It was certainly a craft of wonderful symmetry in architecture, and a rakish appearance that would have cast suspicion upon her in southern waters.

"Come, here we are, Mr. De Vigne; this is the Sea Gipsy, and, if you accept the offer, I make you my first luff."

"What! do you mean it?"

"Yes, why not? You are a sailor and I have seen your courage tried; it is too dark to see my colors, even if they were at the peak, but you observe that the schooner is armed, and there are sixty gallant lads on board to man the guns."

"Get up the anchor, Señor Ramirez, and put to sea. Come, De Vigne, let us go into the cabin and drink to your escape and a lucky cruise," and Captain Waldron led the bewildered young man down into his gorgeously-furnished cabin.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CAPTAIN'S STORY.

"BE seated, De Vigne, and join me in a glass of this wine; it will bring a little blood into your face—Ah! feel how the Sea Gipsy careens to the wind; she will soon be through the Narrows, and leaping over the waves of the Atlantic, and then ho! for the waters of the Gulf," and Captain Waldron gazed upon De Vigne's face to note the effect of his words; but his guest asked calmly:

"You are bound for Southern waters then?"

"Yes, I am a lover of the blue waves of the Mexican Gulf, and its shores are ever beautiful to me."

"But you are not a Mexican?"

"Oh no; I am a Boston boy, or rather was, in the long ago, and my father was a wealthy merchant there, and gave me two chances in life—either to study for the church, or follow in his footsteps."

"I declined both, and decided for myself, by running off to sea in a pretty brigantine, whose beauty I had been admiring for some days, as she lay at anchor in the harbor."

"She cleared for the Kennebec in ballast, for lumber, but when she dropped anchor it was in an African river, and her mission there was to get a cargo of black cattle for the plantations of the South."

"I liked not such bartering in human flesh, and deserted the day the brig set sail, and joined the caravan of traders going into the interior."

"Of my wanderings in Africa I will not tire you with a description; but, after being a slave to Arabs, and passing three years of suffering, I escaped, and reaching Algiers, shipped in a vessel that was bound to London, but was captured by a Moorish corsair, and served some time as a galley slave, when a Greek cruiser attacked the vessel, and I readily joined the more civilized service, in which I rose to a lieutenant's rank."

"But I fell prisoner some time after to the Turks, was carried to Constantinople, but my good luck stuck to me, and I managed to get away, and, after wandering in Eastern lands for some time, joined a caravan to Bagdad, from whence I went to Calcutta, and soon after learning of a Spanish man-of-war intending to sail for Cuba, I shipped on board as a common sailor."

"Well, I served in the Buenos Ayrean navy, and then got a roving commission from Mexico, but lost my vessel in a combat with a cruiser I had no right to fight."

"Now, however, I have this vessel under me, and I had it built to my own fancy, and I go to the Gulf, not only as a Mexican cruiser, but as a pirate-hunter, for there is one man I wish to run down, and that is *Don Diablo*."

Howard started as the captain spoke the name he now had such cause to hate, and said, earnestly:

"I am with you heart and soul, Captain Waldron, in that duty."

"So I hoped you would be; but do you know you are strangely like that sea fiend?"

The blood came into the face of Howard De Vigne, but he asked, in an indifferent way: "You have seen him then?"

"Yes, I was his prisoner once, for I have not told you all my experience in southern waters; he captured a vessel on which I was a passenger, and learning who I was, made me walk the plank into the sea, with my hands bound behind me, and a thirty-two pound shot fastened to me."

"Great God! and you escaped?"

"Yes; the villain who bound me did not take into consideration my small hands, and I easily slipped them out of the rope, took a knife from my pocket and severed myself from the shot that was dragging me down to death, and rose to the surface of the sea to find that the pirate vessel was a cable's-length distant."

"But the land, a small island of the West Indies, was not far away, and, a good swimmer, I reached it, and now live to settle the account with Don Diablo."

"You certainly have cause to revenge yourself upon Don Diablo, and—so have I!"

"You! why you set him free, or allowed him to escape, when he was in your power, or rumor speaks falsely."

"Rumor speaks the truth; I did let him go, yet why I will not tell you; now, however, I wish to meet him once more, for he must die, though not by my hand; but were you in earnest in offering me the position of second luff on your vessel?"

"Indeed I was, and we will have a jolly cruise together, for it was to get a roving commission from the Mexicans that I purchased and fitted out this vessel at my own expense, for I have another score to settle in the Gulf, and with a band of men even worse than pirates, for they kill, with no risk to themselves; I refer to the wreckers of the Bahamas."

"They are indeed a vile set."

"Yes, and are in league with the pirates, who give to them a great deal of their booty to dispose of; but I think we can manage to discover their haunts, and woe be to them, for, De Vigne, I once loved a beautiful girl; it was some six years ago now, and the ship in which her parents and herself sailed from Corpus Christi to New York was wrecked by the wreckers' false beacons, and all were lost," and the voice of the adventurous mariner trembled as he spoke; but in an instant he renewed his old light-hearted manner again, and said:

"Come on deck, and see if my little schooner does not keep pace with the wind, for the roll of the waves tells me that we are in the Atlantic."

As the two men reached the deck, Juan Ramirez, a dark-faced young Mexican, stepped toward them, and said:

"Captain Waldron, I was just going to call you, sir, for, if I mistake not, that vessel astern is in pursuit of us."

"Ha! that is strange, Ramirez; your glass, please," and the Mexican commander bent a long and earnest gaze upon the coming vessel, which had just rounded Sandy Hook and was heading down the coast.

"She is armed, and is coming on well; but why do you think she is in chase, Ramirez?"

"After we passed her, where she lay off Staten Island, there seemed some excitement on board, and signals were exchanged with a sloop-of-war that was anchored further inshore, and shortly after she set sail and stood down the harbor."

"It looks strange; but we have been doing no mischief, and I cannot understand it; crowd on sail, Señor Ramirez, and let us see if the Gipsy cannot show her a clean pair of heels."

More sail was spread upon the schooner, which increased her speed considerably; but the vessel astern also spread more canvas, and still held her own.

"By Neptune! I'll not run from him, now I see he is really in pursuit, so shorten sail and let him come up, and we'll find out what he wants with an honest craft; here, De Vigne, see what you think of yonder fellow."

Howard De Vigne had been listlessly regarding the low, sandy shores of Sandy Hook, as the schooner sped along, not having cast more than a cursory glance astern at the coming vessel; but, aroused by the words of Captain Waldron, he took the glass and turned it upon the craft that seemed now in full chase.

It was a starlight night, and not very bright; but after one glance through the glass, Howard De Vigne lowered it, and said:

"I know that craft well, Captain Waldron; it is the brigantine-of-war Vidette, the very vessel I was first officer of."

"Ha! can they have in any way an idea of your being on board, and intend to retake you? By Heaven! they'll find it rough work."

"Captain, I beg you not to fire upon the Vidette, for she is now under command of one I respect and esteem most highly."

"I heard that Captain Marsden had been ordered to command her, and she was to be sent to the Gulf again."

"Yes, sir, and Captain Marsden was the father of the maiden I told you was lost on the Blue Wave."

"Ah! then we must show the Vidette our

heels; dress the Gipsy up in all she'll carry, Ramirez."

"Ay, ay, sir," and as the Mexican issued the order there came a flash from the bows of the Vidette, and a shot was sent flying after the Sea Gipsy, showing that the pursuit was to be in earnest.

CHAPTER XV.

CAPTAIN WALDRON ACTS MYSTERIOUSLY.

"PORT! hard-a-port your helm!"

The order came from the lips of Captain Jack Waldron, and rung out above the roar of wind and waves, for it was blowing a gale.

"Now strip her of every inch of canvas, and the brig will think we have foundered."

The order was quickly obeyed, and lying low in the water, with her slender, tapering masts stripped of every atom of canvas, it was not possible for a passing vessel to discover the Sea Gipsy at three cables' length.

It was several weeks after the fleet schooner sailed from New York harbor, with the Vidette in chase, and the long course had been a constant pursuit, for the brigantine-of-war was as fleet as a bird, and, though unable to keep within range of the swifter Sea Gipsy, had held her in sight both day and night. Now the two were approaching Vera Cruz, and already from the foretop of the schooner the lights of the distant city had risen above the horizon.

A gale at sunset had swept over the Gulf, the waves ran high and both vessels had been compelled to reef close; but, just as Howard De Vigne had expected to see the schooner head directly for the lights of the San Juan d'Uloa that guarded the entrance to the harbor of Vera Cruz, the order had come from the lips of Captain Waldron that had suddenly changed her course and brought her to under bare poles.

Now and then, as the low hull arose on a high wave, the distant Vidette could be seen, by her lights, pressing persistently on after the craft that had so bravely led her from New York.

"She will expect that we have run directly for Vera Cruz, and therefore not be looking for us here," said Captain Waldron to Howard De Vigne.

"And do you not intend to go on into Vera Cruz?" asked Howard, with some surprise.

"Oh, yes! you and I will go up to the city, but not the schooner, which we run into a lagoon not far away; you see I wish to add to my crew, for I have some of my old fellows awaiting me in Vera Cruz, and I don't half like this second officer Ramirez, and the men he brought with him."

"Then he was not with you in your other cruises?"

"Oh, no; I sent, as soon as I got my schooner started by the builders, my first-lieutenant, Rodriguez, to Mexico after more men, and he fell sick and died, and Ramirez, who was his friend, came on with the crew; but see, the Vidette is flying by us in the darkness, and will run right into the harbor, where she thinks we have gone; now, Mr. De Vigne, you can get sail on the schooner, and we will head for the Black Lagoon."

"Why that is said to be the haunt of buccaneers!" said Howard.

"So I have heard, but it matters not; we can leave the schooner there, and a fisherman friend of mine will furnish us with horses, and we can reach Vera Cruz by daylight."

Howard De Vigne said no more, but, as the Vidette had passed, and was heading directly for the harbor, he soon got sail on the schooner, which at once put away for the Black Lagoon.

Under the guidance of Captain Waldron, who seemed to wholly understand the channels, the vessel wound its way into the dark waters of a small creek, whose banks were lined with large trees, from the branches of which hung festoons of Spanish moss.

Dropping anchor in this secluded and gloomy retreat, a boat was lowered, and into it sprang Captain Waldron and was rowed rapidly to the shore.

Howard De Vigne stood leaning over the taffrail, and, shortly after the boat disappeared in the darkness, heard a loud hail which was answered from inland a short distance, and then all was silent once more, until the sound of oars again broke the deathlike stillness.

A moment after the boat again appeared, and Captain Waldron sprang on deck.

"Come, De Vigne, Soto can give us horses, and we will ride at once to the city, for I wish you to accompany me."

Howard quickly made his preparations, and half an hour after the captain and his lieutenant approached a low adobe hut, before which stood a Mexican holding two horses by the bridle.

"If I do not return by land, Soto, I will send your mustangs to Indio," said Captain Waldron, and the two mounted and rode rapidly away, the commander of the schooner seeming to know the way through the dark woodland as thoroughly as he did the cabin of his own vessel.

A hard ride of several hours, and the lights of Vera Cruz came in sight, and, with a stream of market-people, the two sailors entered the gates, as soon as they were thrown open.

"We will go to the Plaza Hotel, De Vigne, and seek a little rest, and then have breakfast," said Captain Waldron, and dismounting, soon after the captain led the way into the office of the hotel.

Glancing over the list of names lately registered, he pointed silently to one that caught his eye; it was:

"CAPTAIN MERTON MARSDEN,

"American Brigantine-of-war Vidette."

"Yes, he has arrived before us," said Howard, sadly.

"And, as you do not care to be seen by him, you will have to keep your room until I get you a disguise," and Captain Waldron took up the quill, and, to Howard De Vigne's intense surprise, registered as follows:

"HERNAN CORTEZ—Captain.

"LEON SAN QUENTIN—Lieutenant.

"Spanish Navy."

"What means this change of names, Captain Waldron?" asked Howard, as the two were shown into their rooms.

"Sh—! my dear boy, you must not ask questions in Mexico, for no one answers them."

"Come, let us seek rest, now, and over a good breakfast we will talk about our plans for the future; pleasant dreams," and, passing into an adjoining room, Captain Waldron threw himself upon a bed and was soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER XVI.

THREE STARTLING LETTERS.

WHEN Howard De Vigne awoke the sun was high in the heavens, as he saw by pulling back the heavy curtains of his window, and his watch showed him that it was two o'clock.

Dressing rapidly he glanced into the next room to find the captain gone, and upon a table a note for him to eat breakfast, and not await his return for their meal.

This he decided to do, and he called for a servant and had a substantial repast ordered to his room, for he cared not to meet Captain Marsden, the father of poor Lucille, whom he had so loved, and not knowing, too, but that he had been sent in the Vidette after him.

"I have committed the crime of releasing that monster, Don Diablo, and the world will believe me as vile as he; in fact, after my escape from prison, were I taken back to New York, I fear they would try me as his ally."

"Ah, me! it was a sad day for me when I set that wretch free; but, alas! what could I do, when my poor mother requested that I should not be the one to bring my father to the gallows?"

"And what was her reward? To lose her life by his hands; and for this act he has torn from my heart the thought that I am his son, and I live to revenge her death."

He paced the room with quick, nervous tread, and after awhile resumed:

"But, why these mysterious actions of Captain Waldron, in not, as a Mexican naval officer, running into Vera Cruz, but seeking a hiding-place for his vessel in the Black Lagoon?"

"And then registering us under assumed names, and as of the Spanish navy?"

"There is some mystery to be solved in all this; but he seems honest, and has certainly been a good friend to me, and I will trust him until I find out that he is different from what I believe."

The servant now entered with food, of which Howard ate heartily, and then sat down to smoke a cigar, and glance out upon the plaza, which his window commanded a view of.

But he had not been seated there long before a knock came at the door, and a servant ushered into the room no less a personage than Soto, the Mexican fisherman of the Black Lagoon.

"Ah, señor, is not the Captain Hernan Cortez here?" asked the fisherman, and Howard muttered:

"More mystery, for this man calls him Hernan Cortez."

Then aloud, he answered:

"No, he has gone out, and I know not when to expect his return."

"It is too bad, for I have a letter for him of the greatest importance," and Howard De Vigne saw by the man's looks that he was deeply troubled about something.

"I am his lieutenant, and if it concerns the schooner you can give it to me."

"Very well, señor, so I will do," and the man handed forth an official-looking document, heavily sealed with wax.

Breaking the seal, he read, while his face became pallid, and his eyes burned with the intense feeling within, the following remarkable epistle:

"ON BOARD PIRATE SCHOONER SEA GIPSY.

"TO CAPTAIN JACK WALDRON,

"Greeting—

"To a man of your versatile talent, and wonderful pluck, I feel that I can communicate startling tid-

ings without fear of breaking your heart, or maddening your brain; but even were both results to follow, I deem it my duty to state to you, my dear captain, that the writer of this is the supposed old Cuban sailor, whom, in the kindness of your heart, you promised to give a berth to his home, when you found him alone and friendless in New York.

"And now to a scrap of history from the past:

"Some months ago, now nearly half a year, the pirate schooner of Don Diablo was sunk off the Cuban coast, in action with a vessel-of-war, and Satan, indulgent to his own, allowed the chief and a few of his men to escape.

"Attempting to take possession of the packet ship Spanish Queen, Don Diablo got caught in his own trap, and was sent in irons to New York, where he escaped death on the gallows, under circumstances not necessary to state, and disguising himself sought to make another effort to tread the deck of a fleet craft as its commander.

"By accident he met you, and appealing to your sailor's heart for aid, you carried him on board of your beautiful schooner, thereby giving him the stepping-stone to fortune, for, in Ramirez, your Mexican lieutenant, he recognized one who had once sailed under him, and who had put to death your Lieutenant Rodriguez, whom you had sent to Vera Cruz for a crew.

"A clever rascal, Ramirez at once decided upon a plan to get possession of a fine schooner, and went on to New York with his cutthroats, with a plausible story that Rodriguez had died of fever and sent him on in his place.

"But, once a member of Don Diablo's league, ever a member, and recognizing his former officer, the chief made himself known, and the result is that you had not been gone from your schooner half an hour before your vessel was under another master, and those of your men who would not join the new chief were quietly put to death."

"Great God! Soto, is it true that the Sea Gipsy has been seized by Don Diablo?" cried Howard, in utter amazement.

"Too true, señor; he seized her without trouble, for it seems he had his own men, and put to death some half-dozen of Captain Cortez's crew who would not side with him."

"Oh! curses rest on that man! and to think that the old sailor, with white locks, long gray beard and bent, tottering form, was Don Diablo!"

"Ah, man, there shall one day come a reckoning between thee and me, for thy crimes," and the face of Howard De Vigne grew almost black with passion.

After a moment he went on reading the letter of Don Diablo:

"To-night the Sea Gipsy sails for deep water, and ere long the world shall hear of
"DON DIABLO, the Red Rover."

As Howard turned the page over a piece of paper fell to the floor.

Taking it up he saw that it was sealed also, and to his surprise it was addressed to him.

With a hand that trembled, in spite of his self-control, he broke the seal and read:

"Let Howard Quesala know that the same motive that prompted him to save my life saves his, for I allow him to go free, though I took the life of his mother, in revenge for her desertion of me.

"In vain did she beg me for mercy, when I held the knife above her heart, and just so merciless will I be to him, should he ever attempt to hunt down his father, Reno Quesala, but now known as
"DON DIABLO."

"By the Heaven above I will hunt him down, and, just so merciless as he was to her, so will I be to him," cried Howard De Vigne fiercely, as he sprang to his feet and rapidly paced the floor, while Soto the fisherman gazed upon him with almost dread of him.

A knock at the door suddenly recalled Howard to himself, and, with an effort to control his feelings, he called out:

"Come in!"

"A lady to see the señor," said the servant.

"You mean to see Captain Wal—Cortez, I mean?"

"No, señor, to see you."

"To see me?" asked Howard, with surprise.

"Yes, señor; to see the Señor Leon San Quentin."

"Ah! where is she?"

"At the stairway, señor."

"Bid her enter, please."

A moment after a slight form, heavily veiled, entered the room, and Howard advanced toward her, and asked politely:

"Is there not some mistake, señorita; or do you wish to see me?"

"I have come to see you, Señor Americano, and the captain has sent me; but I wish the interview to be private," and having spoken in one of the sweetest of voices, she glanced at Soto.

Howard saw her look, and said to the fisherman:

"Will you return, please, in half an hour, Soto?"

"Willingly, señor," and the man departed.

As the door closed upon him, the woman locked it, and then threw back her veil, revealing a face of rare loveliness, but evidently of the Jewish type.

"Señor, I have this letter for you from Captain Cortez," and she handed a missive which Howard quickly unfolded, while he bade her be seated.

Then, as she sunk gracefully into a chair, he read, with as much amazement as he had the letter of Don Diablo, the following:

"CITY BARRACKS.

"TO LIEUTENANT HOWARD DE VIGNE:

"MY DEAR DE VIGNE:—That I have deceived you, I may as well be the first to make known, ere it flies on busy tongues over the city who and what I am.

"The history I gave you of myself was true, excepting the latter part of my still being in the Mexican service.

"To be frank, you may have heard of the duel between the Mexican General Destello and a naval Captain Waldros?

"Well, I was the Waldros who killed General Destello, and for it my vessel was to be taken from me, and I to serve for years in the Castle San Juan d'Uloa, which I knew was as good as my death-warrant.

"Not caring for death, I put to sea, and— Well, why deny it? I raised the sable flag, and cruised under it for several years, when my vessel was caught in close quarters one day, and, after a fierce action against a heavy foe, was sunk, and I was captured and taken to Vera Cruz and condemned to die, but escaped through the kindness of friends, and then sought New York, where I built the Sea Gipsy for service once more on the blue waters.

"Now you know why I ran into the Black Lagoon instead of the harbor of Vera Cruz; but I came to this city to claim my bride, the one who will hand you this letter, and to whom I owe my escape before.

"Recognized this morning, in spite of the disguise I assumed ere leaving the hotel, I was arrested and thrown into prison, and if I do not again manage to escape, my early demise at the end of a rope is certain, so do what you can for
Yours truly,

"JACK,

"Condemned as Castilla the Corsair."

"What! is the writer of this letter the famous man whom the Mexicans call El Pirata, and who is otherwise known as Castilla the Corsair?" asked Howard.

"Alas! it is too true, señor," said the maiden, sadly.

"And he gave you this letter for me?"

"Yes, señor; his gold bought a messenger to come to me, and I sought him in prison, and he bade me seek you."

"And you will aid him to escape again, that he may dye the seas with human blood?"

"He is good to me, señor, whatever he may be to others, and I love him."

There was no argument that Howard could bring to bear that would break down this woman's love, and he knew it; yet what was he to do?

He was a stranger in Vera Cruz, only having touched there several times before in his vessel, and he believed that Captain Marsden of the Vidette had come there in chase of him, so he dared not move out of the hotel, unless in disguise.

He had formed a strong attachment for Captain Jack Waldron, as he knew him, and believing that circumstances, not inclination, had made him what he was, he would willingly aid him to escape, and spend the money he had fortunately brought with him from the schooner as freely as water; but he did not wish to have him go free to once more sail under the pirate flag.

For some moments he remained in deep thought, while the maiden watched him with anxious eyes, and then he asked:

"Do you believe it possible for the captain to escape?"

"Yes, señor, for gold will buy anything in Mexico."

"And you have a plan, señorita?"

"I have, señor, and if you will not aid me, I will act alone," was the firm reply of the Mexican girl.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONSUELO.

"I WILL aid you in your plan, señorita, but upon conditions," said Howard De Vigne, after several moments of deep thought.

"Name your conditions, señor," and the girl arose and faced him.

"That Captain Waldron, *El Pirata*, or whatever he may be called, pledges himself never again to sail under the flag of a free rover."

"Oh, Señor Americano, if he would only pledge himself to this, how happy would I be," she cried, earnestly.

"He must make the pledge, or he must meet his fate," replied Howard, with firm resolve.

"No, señor, I would save him, even if I knew he would again sail under the black flag; but we must make him believe that he can only go free under such a pledge, and once made, he will keep it."

"Why, a man of his sea-knowledge can easily get command of some merchant craft in the United States, that will bring him a good living for himself and wife, should he marry."

The maiden blushed, but answered with an air of pride:

"He does not need such a position, señor, as he has, or will have, ample means of support, as my father will give me a fortune upon my marriage."

"But your father knows not whom you will marry?"

The maiden seemed worried at the question, but after awhile replied:

"I am sorry to confess that my father knows all; but, señor, I had nearly forgotten to tell you that *El Capitan* said that your old vessel, the Vidette, came not here in search of you, as

he discovered this morning, but after Don Diablo, whom a deserter from the Sea Gipsy, in New York, had said was on board the schooner in disguise."

"Ha! that was then the cause of the Vidette's determined chase of us; but the deserter told the truth, señorita, as this letter, which you can read, as you seem to know the captain's secrets, will tell you," and Howard placed in her hands the communication from Don Diablo, which she read with intense surprise, but, instead of showing regret, cried joyously:

"The loss of his vessel, señor, will be another reason to make him pledge himself as you demand."

"I fear not, señorita, knowing the captain's nature as I do; it would cause him to be more anxious for revenge against Don Diablo; you must bring a more powerful incentive to bear upon him."

"And that is—"

"Love!"

"Ah! I will do all in my power; but have you any suggestion to offer to aid his escape?"

"None, for I am such a stranger here; but my plan was to act upon your remark awhile ago, that gold will buy anything in Mexico, and I have a fortune, I may say, in American notes, that I suppose I could get exchanged here."

"Oh yes, señor, my father can arrange that; but I will not require your money, as I have plenty, and I have a person to work upon that I know will be won over; but, while I am plotting the captain's escape, will you visit the vessels in the harbor and see if you can buy, or charter, a small craft, to bear us out of Vera Cruz?"

"I will do so; but will not the guard-boats search the craft going out, especially when the escape of the captain is known?"

"Yes, but it must sail at sunset; a coast lugger is best, and, as Don Diablo has run off with the Sea Gipsy, the Black Lagoon would be a good rendezvous to meet us— Ha!"

A knock at the door caused the maiden to start, and opening it, Howard beheld Soto, who said politely:

"Pardon, señor; but if possible I would like to return at once, for in my haste I came alone in my lugger, and I fear it will come on to blow to-night."

"What is the size of your lugger, good Soto?" quickly asked Howard, with a significant glance at the maiden.

"Ten tons, señor."

"And a good sailer?"

"She sails like a bird, señor."

"Then here is some gold for you, with which to purchase a month's stores; is there any one at your cabin that can aid you to sail your craft?"

"Yes, señor, my son is as good a sailor as myself."

"Very well; lay your stores in at once, and also put your lugger's cabin in the best of order for lady guests; here is ample money for you, and you can make more gold for the service of yourself and craft for a short time than you can in a year's fishing, which I believe is your occupation."

"It is so believed to be, señor," said Soto, with a peculiar smile, and he pocketed the gold with the air of a man who held it as his god.

"Now get to the Black Lagoon as soon as possible, and keep your sails up to leave at a moment's warning."

"Si, señor," and the man departed, while Howard De Vigne turned again to Consuelo Douro, the Mexican maiden, and said:

"That much is arranged, señorita."

"And well arranged, señor; now to do my part, but I will exact the pledge from *El Capitan*."

"You must, and your love must make him keep it."

"I will do all in my power; but shall I carry him the letter of Don Diablo?"

"Yes."

"Now, señor, let me tell you that it is best that you remain not longer in this hotel, so call the servant and settle your bill, and then put on this disguise of a Mexican *caballero*, for it will attract no attention, and these whiskers will change your face beyond recognition—nay, do not hesitate, but do as I say, for you are to be my father's guest."

For an instant Howard seemed unwilling to disguise himself, but the entreaty of the maiden prevailed, and he promised that he would do so.

"Now, señor, ring for the servant when I have gone, and then put on your disguise, and seek the home of the Jew, Jacobi Douro, to which any one can direct you."

"Tell my father that his daughter, Consuelo, sent you and you will be welcome. Adios, señor."

Drawing her veil over her face and her mantilla around her form, the beautiful maiden left the room, and a quarter of an hour after Howard De Vigne followed her, no one recognizing him as other than the Mexican *caballero* he appeared, for he spoke Spanish with perfect purity, having learned it from his mother in infancy.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JACOBI, THE JEW.

AFTER a walk of some squares, through the better part of the city, Howard De Vigne was directed to a dismal-looking quarter, where he was told the Jew, Jacobi Douro, dwelt, and the person who gave the information looked at the young man with a shrug of the shoulders and a sad smile as he turned away, while he muttered to himself:

"Been playing too heavy at monté; poor señor; I know how to sympathize with you, and you need condolence, señor caballero, to have to go to old Jacobi for money, for he will bleed you of your last ounce of gold."

At last Howard paused before a dilapidated-looking structure, that seemed to date back to the age of the Aztecs, and saw on a sign above the door:

"JACOBI DOURO,

"DEALER IN

"JEWELRY, GEMS AND CLOTHING.

"*Liberal Advances Made on Personal Property of All Kinds.*"

Having read this legend of Jacobi's occupation, the young American entered the shop, and glanced around him with an air of contempt, for he knew that each article his eye rested upon held a story of misfortune, want or crime, and that those who had left them there had paid dearly for the little they had received for them.

Around the walls hung a motley array of scarlet, green, blue, black and gray garments of all kinds and descriptions, from the showy uniform of a general, down to the rude attire of the herder, while in the windows, on either side of the door, were watches, jewelry, precious stones, pistols, cimeters, dirks of every nationality, and a vast assortment of articles that went to make up the collection worthy of a curiosity-shop, or museum.

A boy, in a red cap, and smoking a cigarrito, was the only occupant of the shop, if I except a chattering parrot, which the youth was teasing into a fury, for his own amusement, causing him to swear in real good, sound Spanish, and bring down the maledictions of the saints upon the unbelieving juvenile Hebrew's head.

"*Carambo! Nombre de Dios!*" shrieked the parrot, who had been piously raised in a Catholic family, whose necessities had caused them to pawn him to the Jew.

"*Hal hal ha!*" laughed the young tormentor, "I ish teach you to swear mit Abraham, Isaac ant Jacob."

"Boy, I would see the Señor Jacobi," said Howard.

The young Hebrew, with an eye to business, quickly left off teasing poor Polly, and turned his glittering black eyes upon Howard, while he said, politely, and in pure Spanish:

"The Señor Jacobi is engaged; but I can arrange a loan for you, señor."

"I need no loan, boy, and did I, it would not be here that I would come to pay usurious interest; I wish to see the Señor Jacobi, personally."

"Your name, señor?"

"It matters not."

"Then you cannot see him, for he is engaged."

"Tell him that I am sent by the Señorita Consuelo."

This name seemed a talisman, for, with more politeness than he had before shown, the youth emptied a chair of its heavy load of apparel, and said:

"Be seated, señor, and I will make known your presence."

Declining the proffered seat, Howard remained standing, while the youth went to a corner of the room, and writing a few lines upon a piece of paper, placed it in what appeared to be a tin tube sticking out of the wall.

Then he pulled a bell-rope, and a moment after Howard De Vigne saw the paper suddenly disappear back in the tube.

For a short while he waited, and then a door opened at the rear of the shop, and a deep voice said:

"Come this way, señor."

Howard obeyed, and as the door closed behind him he found himself in a narrow hallway, and in the presence of a man whose appearance could not fail to strike him as remarkable, for, where he had expected to find a small, dried-up specimen of anatomy, for such he supposed the money-lender must be, he discovered before him a man of fine physique, and an air that was imposing, for his features were expressive, his brows strongly arched, his eyes black and piercing and his mouth firm; but his arched nose and red, flexible lips betrayed him as one of the tribe of Israel.

But though to the ordinary observer such a personage, to the close student of human nature Jacobi Douro's eyes were full of avarice, his mouth indicated deceit and cunning, and morally he wore the stamp of what he was, a usurer, a vampire to grow fat upon the flesh of others, to be happy on the misery of those who came to him for aid.

"You would see Jacobi Douro; he stands be-

fore you, señor," said the Jew, in deep, though not unpleasant tones:

"Yes, I am an American, and—"

"Your Spanish is perfect, señor, for a foreigner," was the rather suspicious interruption.

"That may be, señor; but I am an American, and came here with the one whom I believe you know as El Pirata."

"Ah; you are his friend, then?"

"I am, and your daughter, the Señorita Consuelo, sent me here, for I suppose you are aware that El Pirata is in trouble?"

"Yes, and Consuelo has gone to see if she can aid him; as his friend, señor, you are mine; follow me."

He led the way as he spoke along the passageway, up a flight of stairs, and then through a small, iron bound door into a small anteroom.

To the surprise of Howard De Vigne this room looked more like an arsenal than a chamber in a Jew's house, for along the walls were ranged muskets, with the bayonets set on them, and pistols and swords were close at hand.

Seeing his look, the Jew said with a smile:

"In this land of revolutions, Señor Americano, it is but right that we should be prepared to protect our broods and our riches."

"True; but yours is not a race to fight, Señor Douro."

"Touch our children and our gold, señor, and you will find to the contrary; but, come, these quarters are more pleasant," and Jacobi threw a door on the opposite side of the room open, and motioned to Howard De Vigne to enter, which he did, but was almost startled by the scene of beauty that burst upon him, as though he had suddenly stepped into the realms of Fairyland.

"You are welcome as my guest, señor; be pleased to be at home," said the Jew, with courtly grace, motioning Howard to a chair, into which he sunk almost bewildered, while he glanced around him.

He found himself in a large room carpeted with costly rugs that gave back no sound to the tread, and the walls hung with velvet curtains, except where they were drawn aside to display some rare painting or other work of art, or the two windows that opened upon balconies overhanging a garden, an acre in size and an Eden of beauty, for it was filled with exquisite flowers, and there were a score of fountains throwing jets of crystal water into the air.

All around the garden was a wall of considerable height, that precluded the possibility of curious neighbors looking into its privacy from their house-tops, and easy-chairs were placed here and there to invite rest, while hammocks swung from several orange trees, luring to repose.

From the large chamber, which seemed to be a family sitting-room, other doors opened into other apartments, which, as the Jew, excusing himself for a moment, entered, Howard saw were furnished in the same luxurious and beautiful style.

Remembering the squalid appearance of the shop and the front of the house, Howard De Vigne seemed to feel that he had been suddenly transported into an Eden of luxury and beauty.

Returning to the room the Jew was followed by a servant, also an Israelite, bearing a silver waiter, upon which were decanters of wine, glasses and sweet biscuit, with a small taper and roll of cigarritos.

Placing the waiter upon a table the servant retired, and the Jew poured out a glass of rich wine for his guest, and offered him a cigarrito; but, ere the wine was drunk the door opened and Consuelo, the Jewess, swept into the room, and her father rising, introduced his guest, as though the two had never before met.

"My daughter, the Señorita Consuelo, Señor De Vigne," he said, with stately dignity.

Howard arose, but saw before him a very different being from the darkly clad maiden who had called upon him two hours before, for she had changed her street attire for a beautiful robe of canary silk, that was exceedingly becoming to her dark style of beauty, while its sweeping train added dignity and grace to her carriage.

"I am glad to find you my father's guest, señor," said Consuelo, in a pleasant tone, extending her small and shapely hand.

"The pleasure is with me, señorita, I assure you; but may I ask if you have seen Captain Waldron?"

"Yes, I left him half an hour since."

"And he gives the pledge required of him?"

"Yes, though at first he demurred, as he seemed reluctant to give up his hope of revenge upon Don Diablo, who in such a masterly manner stole his schooner from him; but he gave me his solemn pledge to give up piracy, and settle down in New York, where my father has long wished to go."

"I am glad of it; now how to arrange his escape from prison, for I suppose he will be taken from the barracks to-morrow out to the San Juan d' Uloa?"

"And he who enters there, señor, leaves hope behind," said the deep voice of the Jew.

"Yes; he is to be sent to the Castle to-morrow morning, and will be almost immediately executed, so what is done must be done to-

night, and it rests now with but one person, Major Fernando Navaro."

Ere Howard could make reply the servant entered and said:

"Major Fernando Navaro would see the Señor Jacobi."

"Ah! now comes the test, for he is here; you know the saying, Señor De Vigne, 'Speak of the devil and his imps will appear?' Well, this is one of them, and in his hands is the life of *El Pirata*," remarked Consuelo.

"Your manner gives me hope for the captain, señorita," said Howard.

"We shall see; the God of Israel be with you, my father," replied the maiden, as Jacobi Douro, excusing himself to his guest, left the room.

CHAPTER XIX.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

MAJOR FERNANDO NAVARO was a tall, well-formed Mexican, of perhaps thirty-five, and wore an undress uniform.

About him there was an air of good birth, though his face wore a haggard, dissipated look that marred it in a measure, and the dark hair and mustache were already streaked with silver threads.

He was pacing up and down an inner office on the same floor as the shop, where the Jew asked his better class of customers when they came on private business, and his dark eyes were burning in the intensity of thought that flashed through them, while his brows were contracted into a savage scowl, and the lips firmly set, excepting when they parted in some muttered imprecation, that proved mentally he was suffering exquisite anguish.

As the door opened and Jacobi entered, he started, as though he wore in his heart the curse of a guilty conscience, and said angrily:

"Well, Jew, you take your time with those who owe you."

"I did not hasten, señor, for I had a guest sipping wine with me."

"*Caramba!* he must have paid for it then, or you will get pay from him in some way, for you would spend not a peso to keep thy soul from perdition," was the rude retort.

"Señor, as you are in no humor to talk with I will leave you," and the Jew turned to go.

But the officer sprung forward quickly and cried:

"Pardon me, señor, but I am driven mad by my troubles to-day, and—"

"You brought them upon yourself; if you play, you must expect to lose; if you live like a prince, you must expect to pay for your luxuries."

"I am in no humor to listen to lectures, Jacobi; I need money, and by the name of the Heavens, I must have it."

"You received my message that your notes were due to-day?"

"Yes, and not an eagle have I to pay them with, so you must renew them, and give me more besides."

"Must is a strong word to use, señor, when a beggar speaks to one he seeks a favor of."

"Curse you! do you dare to call me a beggar?" fiercely said the Mexican.

"Give me a better name and I will make use of it, señor; you have come to me for money, and yet owe me to-day thirty thousand pesos."

"And I need twenty thousand more; make my notes over again for fifty thousand at three months, and give me fifteen thousand; that will give you five thousand for interest."

"And what security have you, señor, to offer me?"

"Net a jewel, hoof, hut or acre of land," was the bitter reply.

"Then you cannot have the money."

"You have all my property mortgaged to you now."

"And you have had one-half its value in money, which you have gambled away, or drank and eaten up. I must have a margin to make something out of Señor Navaro."

"One-half you get, and call it a margin; well, give me the time I ask and the fifteen thousand?"

"I cannot."

"I am ruined if you do not, for I have two debts of honor to pay this night, and my small creditors are on my track rattling their bills in my face."

"You should keep out of debt."

"Bah! I should do many things I do not do; give me the money I ask."

"I cannot."

"Why?"

"I want security."

"I have nothing to give you, as you know, thou accursed usurious son of Israel."

"And I have no money for you."

"Dog of an Israelite, I will have thy gold, or thy heart's blood," and thrusting his right hand suddenly into his breast, he drew out a long dagger and sprung upon the Jew, grasping him by the throat, and holding the blade uplifted over his heart.

But the Jew did not move, nor did his eye quail, as he said in a voice, hoarse from the pressure upon his face:

"Señor Navaro, release thy hold."

"Wilt give me the money I ask?" was the savage response.

"No."

"I will kill thee if thou dost not."

"No, for you are in my power, not I in thine," and the Jew snapped his fingers, and savage growls answered, while out of a curtained alcove bounded two huge Spanish bloodhounds.

With a cry of horror the Mexican started back; but the Jew said quietly:

"Have no fear, señor, unless I am in danger, and then they will tear you in pieces; back to your kennel, Don and Duenna!"

The bloodhounds silently obeyed, and the Mexican officer, wholly unnerved, turned to Jacobi, and said in a humble tone:

"Señor, I was mad, I am mad, for I stand on the verge of ruin, and you alone can save me."

"How, señor?"

"Give me the money I ask."

"There is one way I can accommodate you."

"How, pray tell me?" cried the Mexican, eagerly.

"You have a prisoner in your keeping at the barracks?"

"There are several."

"There is one arrested this morning."

"Ah, *El Pirata*."

"Yes."

"Well, he is to die on the morrow; to be shot outside the city walls."

"He must not die."

"I say he must, for the sentence has been passed against him."

"And I say no, Señor Fernando Navaro."

"What is he to thee, Jew?"

"He saved my life once."

"And you seem to regard him as kindly as though he had saved thy gold, for, at thy request I gave thy fair daughter permission to see him; but he is doomed."

"I say he is not, for you can save him."

"You are mistaken."

"No, you can and must."

"Must is a strong word to me, Jacobi Douro."

"It is a word you used to me awhile since, and I return it."

"I tell you, señor, I do not want that man to die, and if you want money you must save him."

"I would not do it for twice the sum I ask for."

"I will give you your notes for thirty thousand, and twenty thousand besides in cash."

"No! no! no! it would cost me my life if I do."

"It will cost him his life if you do not."

"What do I care for his life, Jew?"

"Fifty thousand pesos."

"It is a tempting offer, but I will not."

"I will return you the notes and give you thirty thousand pesos besides."

"*Nombre de Dios!* you are Satan tempting sin, Jew."

"Will you set him free?"

"I would be shot for it in his stead in spite of my family influence and rank."

"No need of it; have some one else shot in your place."

"How mean you, Jew?"

"Where is he confined?"

"In the citadel barrack."

"How many guards over him?"

"One at his cell door, another at the corridor gate, and a sergeant on duty—three."

"Let them be shot."

"In Satan's name what mean you?"

"The regiment of lanceros, just arrived from the city of Mexico, recruited there, I believe?"

"Yes."

"Send two of them, or three, to-night to the citadel barrack, with an order from you for the prisoner; once out of the prison wall I will take care of him, and pay those whom you dispatch for him well for their services, besides giving them a chance to desert from their regiment."

"When it is discovered in the morning that *El Pirata* has flown, have the sergeant and two guards marched out and shot, if need be."

"But they would not deliver him up without my seal, and but one person besides myself could put that on."

"And who is that?"

"My orderly."

"Well, what does his life amount to? Accuse him of being bribed to do the deed, and have him shot, too."

"Jacobi, you are even worse than I am."

"Thank you; we are just becoming acquainted with each other; well, what say you?"

"Make it fifteen thousand more."

"Not a peso."

"*El Pirata* is worth it; give me my notes and forty-five thousand pesos, for it is a fearful risk I run."

"Not as much as the sergeant, guards and your orderly run," said Jacobi, grimly.

"I will not release him for less than the sum I name, if only to have the delight of wringing the money from you, Jew."

"What matters it what you get; it will be all gone soon by gambling."

"Oh no; I can pay my debts with it, and—"

"What?"

"Marry."

"Ah! I have heard you intended marrying

an heiress, and if I remained long in Vera Cruz I would soon get her wealth through, as I have yours."

"We shall see, for luck may turn for me yet."

"I doubt it; but I'll give you the start by making it the sum you ask; come here at ten o'clock and I shall know if you have kept your word, and will then pay you the money and hand you over your notes."

"Can I trust you, Jew?"

"You will have to, Navaro."

"Your race are so slippery, Jacobi."

"And yours are natural cut-throats, Fernando."

"A truce to this bantering; I will trust you because I have to, and be here promptly at ten o'clock, for I have two debts to pay to-night or I am ruined, as I told you."

"If he is free by nine, so much the better for him, and you can receive your money an hour earlier."

"Good! he shall be free."

"Can I trust you?"

"*Caramba!* I give you my word."

"I have your name on paper past due, señor."

"That was business, Jew," replied the Mexican, wincing under the shot.

"Break your word to-night, and you'll find it business, too, for, Señor Fernando Navaro, I know that one of the debts you have to pay to-night is a *forged note-of-hand of your general's*."

The Mexican was staggered at the words of Jacobi, and hissed forth, as he again drew his dagger:

"In Satan's name, how know you this?"

"My hounds' teeth are as sharp as your dagger point, señor," was the cool reply.

Instantly the weapon was thrust back into his breast, while he asked again:

"How know you this, Jew?"

"You received on General Cisneros's note three thousand pesos, and one of your brother-officers cashed it for you, and needing money sold it to me, and I know that you forged it."

"And does any one else know it?" almost groaned the officer.

"No; I hold the note, and I expect you to keep your word to-night, and I will keep mine."

"Enough; *El Pirata* shall go free, if a dozen men have to be shot, and I will be here at nine o'clock," and turning on his heel Major Fernando Navaro left the Jew's abode, a weight removed from his heart.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FLIGHT.

CAPTAIN JACK WALDRON, or as he is now known to the reader, *El Pirata*, was pacing his narrow cell in the citadel barracks, with a face expressive of very little concern, for one who knew that he would look death squarely in the face on the morrow, unless some lucky accident aided him to escape.

But his was a buoyant nature that always rose high under trouble and danger, and he never gave up hope while there was an atom of life remaining.

He had seen Consuelo Douro, and had given her the pledge demanded by Howard De Vigne, not again to engage in piracy, and she had promised to effect his release; this was all the hope he had, yet he did not despair, and was not at all surprised when the cell door opened and the sergeant of the guard stepped in and said:

"There's an order for you to go to headquarters, señor, and two lanceros to guard you there."

"All right; one place is as good as another to me," was the cheery response of *El Pirata*.

"You are certainly a cool one, señor; here, lanceros, mind you guard him well, and if he escapes your heads will fall, for I leave his irons upon him."

"It's a little out of the usual style, but I suppose it's all right, as I have here Major Navaro's written orders, stamped and sealed."

Two soldiers in the lancero uniform then stepped forward, and placing himself between them *El Pirata* moved toward the door, and thence out through the prison-yard, until they stood without the gates, where a clumsy vehicle awaited them.

Into this the guards and their prisoner got, and the driver drove off rapidly in the direction of headquarters; but once around the corner of a street and the vehicle turned in another direction and held on until it drew up under a shed.

Here there was a pause of a short while, and then out from the shadows beneath the shed came three horsemen, well mounted, and dressed as *caballeros*, and at a rapid pace they rode along in the direction of the city gates through which they passed without difficulty, to find on the outer side two persons, also mounted, awaiting them.

"Consuelo! to you I owe my escape; bless you, my darling," and one of the three horsemen rode up to the two who had been in waiting, and one of whom was recognizable as Consuelo Douro, the other as Howard De Vigne.

"And gladly I welcome you, señor; but

come, let us lose no time, for it is a long, hard ride to the Black Lagoon," answered the maiden.

"First let me ask De Vigne to forgive the deception I practiced upon him," and *El Pirata* held forth his hand.

"It is forgiven, captain, for I owe you much, especially as your pledge for the future has been given; but with the Señorita Consuelo I would urge haste now," and thus urged, all started off at rapid gallop, while *El Pirata* asked:

"And your father, Consuelo?"

"Will follow us as soon as he has seen the one to whose pecuniary troubles we owe your release; hark! I hear hoof-falls now."

All drew rein and listened, and the rapid clatter of hoofs was heard.

"There are two horsemen," said *El Pirata*.

"Yes, one is Padre Pinto, for you know—" and Consuelo paused.

"I know you are the sweetest little Jewess in the world, to be married to me by one not of your faith; yes, here they come," and the next moment Jacobi Douro and a person in priestly garb dashed up and were warmly greeted by those who waited them, after which the whole party once more moved on at a swift gallop.

After a sharp ride of several hours they drew up their tired horses upon the banks of the Black Lagoon and at the cabin of Soto, the fisherman, who awaited them.

"Is your lugger ready, Soto?" asked *El Pirata*, as he sprung to the ground and aided Consuelo to alight.

"Yes, señor; but my accommodations are unworthy so fair a lady," responded the fisherman.

"Oh, I can put up with the plainest, good Soto, for where life is at stake we have no cause to complain at the means that save it," pleasantly replied Consuelo, and the rest of the party having entered the cabin the maiden and *El Pirata* followed.

Then, in that humble *adobe* hut, with her father to give her away, and Howard De Vigne as a witness, Consuelo Douro, the Jewish maiden, was made the wife of Jack Waldron, a man outlawed from among his fellow-men as a sea-rover, and upon whose head was set a price.

In deep tones the padre performed the ceremony, asking no questions regarding the creed of either, and then the party drank a toast to the fair bride, and all adjourned on board the lugger, which Soto had made most comfortable with the gold given him by Howard De Vigne.

The two lancero deserters were then paid liberally by the Jew for their services, and all being in readiness Soto and his son spread the sails, farewells were said between Jacobi and his daughter, and then Howard De Vigne approached and extended his hand.

"What! are you not going with us?" asked Consuelo, in surprise.

"No, I remain in Vera Cruz for a time."

"Do you mean it, De Vigne?" asked *El Pirata*, in a tone of voice that showed he was hurt.

"Yes, captain, I have a certain plan on hand, hastily formed, that I wish to carry out."

"I fear that now you know me as *El Pirata* and Castilla, the Corsair, you no longer care to sail on the same deck with me."

"Not so, captain, for you are no longer the one or the other; but I have decided upon a plan of action I cannot now make known, and one of these days you may hear of me."

"Through Señor Douro, I will always know where you are, and from my heart I hope we shall meet again," and Howard again held forth his hand in farewell, and a few moments after the lugger sped out of the dark lagoon toward the open water, while the Jew, padre and American mounted their horses and started back for the city, leaving Soto's peon servant alone in his solitude.

When a couple of leagues from the city gates the sun arose, and, as the three weary horsemen, so strangely brought together, neared the walls they heard the roll of a drum, and beheld a column of soldiers approaching.

Passing through the gates, the troops at slow march, and the band playing a funeral dirge, filed to the left and formed in three sides of a square, the open space toward the wall, and there came to a halt.

"Ha! do you see those three men?" suddenly cried the Jew, pointing to a sergeant and two private soldiers in the midst of a small guard.

"Yes; they are to be executed," answered Howard.

"True, in the place of another; do you mark that officer on horseback?"

"It is the Major Navaro," said the padre.

"Yes, it is Fernando Navaro, and those three poor devils there are to die, for they were the guards over *El Pirata* last night, and they have been drum-head court-martialed and sentenced within the hour, on account of the escape of the prisoner."

"And does Navaro not know they are innocent?" asked Howard De Vigne.

"Oh, yes; but either he or the guards must go, and he prefers that they do, and, having the power, sees that they shall; they face their fate calmly."

"Their innocence upholds them; come, let us ride on, for we are forced to see misery enough in this world, without seeking that we can avoid," replied Howard.

"Alas, yes," answered the padre, with a sigh, "let us ride on, and, in a glass of Señor Jacobi's good wine, drown the remembrance of these poor fellows."

And as the priest spoke and their horses moved forward, there came a volley of musketry, and three innocent men fell dead.

Then gayly the band struck up, and the troops moved back toward the city, while Major Navaro, leaving the officer next in rank in command, rode on ahead.

Catching sight of the Jew, as he passed, not a shadow crossed his face; but bowing pleasantly, he cried:

"An early hour, Señor Douro, to be out; but we cannot neglect military duties; *adios*."

And with a sinister smile, the heartless man dashed on, no seeming regret in his heart that he had sacrificed others to save himself.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN OLD SHIPMATE.

"SHIPMATE, you isn't sailin' under yer true colors, be ye?"

It was several days after the sailing of Soto's lugger from the Black Lagoon, and Howard De Vigne was standing on a pier, looking out over the harbor of Vera Cruz.

He had been the guest of the Jew, Jacobi Douro, since their return to the city, and during the intense excitement that had followed the escape of El Pirata, for the Mexican populace, upon learning of his capture, had treasured up the thought that they would enjoy an execution scene.

Of course the guards having been promptly put to death, for permitting the prisoner to pass out on a forged order, and the orderly of Major Navaro, who was considered the forger, having mysteriously disappeared, along with the two deserters of the Lancero regiment, gave plenty of subject for gossip for several days; but, though every effort was made to find how the prisoner and his allies had left the city, nothing could be ascertained to throw any light upon the subject, other than that El Pirata must have paid largely for his freedom.

Finding that the Vidette had sailed immediately upon her arrival almost, to once more search for the schooner, which she had so persistently chased from New York to the Gulf, Howard De Vigne determined to enter into a plot to capture the noted Don Diablo, and break up the wrecking bands on the Gulf shores, and thereby win favor in the eyes of his countrymen once more, for all feeling in his heart, on account of relationship, had gone out wholly for Don Diablo.

With the money he had won, and which he still had with him, he knew he could purchase a fleet vessel and equip her thoroughly, and for this purpose he had gone down to have a look at the crafts in the harbor, when he was saluted with the words that open this chapter.

With the departure of the Vidette he had thrown aside his false beard, yet still wore his *caballero* dress, and he quickly turned and faced the speaker, who was a thick-set, bronzed-faced sailor, evidently an American, and attired in a pair of white duck pants, blue woollen shirt, and wore on his head a sombrero, while in his belt was a seaman's clasp-knife.

"Why, Nick Nabob, is it you?" and Howard grasped the outstretched hand.

"It are, Master Howard, for sure; I'm ther same old Nabob I war six year ago, when yer caught a knife in yer arm that was meant for my heart, that night in Algiers."

"Yes, Master Howard, you saved my life then, and kept me from a flogging too, sir, when I was about ter git ther cat for being ballasted with grog and under a full head o' sail, and I hasn't forgotten it, sir," said the seaman, wringing the hand of the young man warmly.

"Nor have I forgotten you, Nick; but what are you doing here in Vera Cruz, when there is no vessel in port flying our flag?"

"I might ask the same o' you, Master Howard, but seeing you walk the quarter-deck, and I am only a foremast hand, I dar'n't, sir; but I had a run o' bad luck, sir, got ashore high and dry, and ther ship sailed without me."

"Were you on the Vidette, Nick?"

"No, sir, on ther Tuscarora; I heard you was first luff o' ther Vidette, and captured that pirate Don Diablo."

"Ah, Nick, I was on the Vidette as her first officer, and did capture Don Diablo; but luck has gone against me too, for the pirate chief escaped and—"

"Escaped! has Don Diablo escaped?" asked Nick Nabob, his face flushing, and his manner becoming excited.

"Yes, in New York he made his escape, and I was dismissed from the navy for allowing it. Did you know the Don?"

"Know him? Well, now, I have met him, Master Howard; and he is free once more, you say?" asked the man, cautiously.

"He is, and what is more, and far worse, is at sea again on as fine a schooner as ever sailed."

"Oh, Neptune's sister Sal! do you mean it, Master Howard?"

"I do; but, how is it you are so deeply interested in the Don, Nick?"

"And you isn't in ther navy?" asked Nick, apparently not caring to hear the question of his old officer.

"No, like yourself, I am ashore; but not out of funds, for if you need gold, Nick, you can have it."

"Bless your handsome figure-head, Master Howard! you has ther same big heart as ever; but I don't need no money now, sir, for I am in a good business."

"I am glad to hear that, Nick, and I may say sorry, too, for I have something on hand I was going to ask you to join me in, and I would make you boatswain."

"Bo'sen! well, now, you does remember yer old shipmates, sir; but might I be so bold as to ask yer what's in the wind?"

"Can I trust you, Nick?"

"Master Howard, you saved my life once, and got wounded for it, and the scar's in yer arm now; an' yer saved my back from the cat, an' kept ther scars off of it, an' so long as you carry ther mark o' ther dagger, an' so long as my cable o' life don't part, will I remember you, and never go back on you," and the tears came into the eyes of the seaman, that caused Howard De Vigne to hold out his hand and say, frankly:

"I will trust you, Nick, and—"

"Steady yer tongue tackle one minute, Master Howard, and let me first tell yer that I don't fear to make known to you that I am not the old honest tar I once was."

"Yer see, there was nothing but squalls all ther time to drive me on ther breakers, and at last I slipt ther cable o' honesty, an' drifted right on ther reef o' sin, for I is a bad man, sir, a bad man."

"I guess not, Nick; your heart is in the right place, I know."

"No, sir, for I've gone out o' the channel, and am, in fact, nothing more than a— Well, sir, I'll prove you can trust me by showing you my log, for I know you'll not betray me, as it isn't in your natur' so to do; but if yer can pilot back ag'in into the channel o' righteousness, I'll foller yer wake, sir; but now I is one o' thet cussed band o' Bahama Wreckers."

Howard De Vigne started, and turned his piercing eyes upon the face of the seaman, while he said, sternly:

"Nick, you have indeed steered wildly; what possessed you to give up the berth of an honest man-o'-war's-man to become an outlaw?"

"Temptation, Master Howard, temptation, sir; I got too much grog aboard when ashore in Havana one time, three year ago, and the ship sailed without me."

"Then hard luck came, and by accident one night I did a shipmate a service, and he offered me a berth, which I took, and, bless your soul, sir, it was to be mate o' his little craft that ran between Abaco and Havana, and to Vera Cruz, and sometimes to the Balize, and our cargoes was made up from what came out o' vessels that false beacons lured on reefs, sir."

"And this heinous crime you have continued ever since?"

"I might as well tell the truth, sir; I am now skipper o' ther little craft, and brought a cargo in to-day to our agent here, an old Jew, to buy of us, for I dar'n't take it to Havana or New Orleans, as the goods belonged to the Blue Wave, which was supposed to be sunk."

Howard De Vigne staggered as though the man had struck him a violent blow, and his face turned deadly pale; but recovering himself, he gasped, rather than asked:

"The Blue Wave, you said—?"

"Yes, sir; a clipper ship running between New Orleans and New York, and touching at Havana."

"And she was not sunk?"

"She danced right on to Abaco in a gale, misled by the False Beacon, which she took for the English Light."

"And went to pieces?"

"Was good kindling wood the next morning, Master Howard; did yer know ther craft, sir, for yer got white when I spoke of her?"

"And her crew and—passengers?"

"The crew went into the sea when she struck, and was lost, but—"

"The passengers?" and Howard De Vigne placed his hand upon his heart, as though to still its beating, while his lips quivered with emotion.

"They was in the cabin, sir, and some of 'em were saved, though a few ran on deck, when she struck, and got washed into the sea."

"Nick Nabob, who were saved?"

"Nine persons, sir, among 'em two young and one old lady; the balance were men."

"Their names! the ladies' names, I mean?"

"There was two of one family; a Colonel Tudor and his wife and daughter, and—"

"Oh!"

"Sir?"

"Go on! for the love of God! go on!"

"The other was a perfect angel, sir, and they calls her Lucille; but, sir! Master Howard! what ails you, sir?"

"Tell me! where is she now, man?—I mean Lucille," and Howard De Vigne grasped the man in a clasp of iron.

"A prisoner in Abaco, sir— Great God! he has fainted."

It was true; Howard De Vigne had fallen at the feet of Nick Nabob.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PLOTTERS.

WHEN Howard De Vigne returned to consciousness, he found the anxious face of Nick Nabob bending over him.

"Thank ther Lord, I says, if I be a sinner, Master Howard, ter see yer come round, sir, for I feared once you had slipt ther life-cable, sir," said the seaman, earnestly.

"Ah! I remember now; I swooned away, and fell, for I had not the power to save myself; are we alone, Nick?" and Howard sat up.

"Yes, sir, though it's pesky strange none o' them curious Greasers didn't see yer fall, an' think I kilt yer; they is so fond o' knife-stickin' themselves, they loves to see a row; but here's my boat, sir, an' yonder is my little craft, an' I'll be glad to have you go aboard, if you will."

"I'll go with you, Nick, for there is much I wish to ask you," and, with an effort, Howard De Vigne aroused himself out of the stupor that still oppressed him, and getting into the little boat, was pulled by Nick Nabob out to a little shallop that lay at anchor, a cable's length from the shore.

As they neared it, Howard De Vigne noticed that it was a craft of sixty tons' burden, with flush deck, was rigged with fore and mainsail, and steered with a tiller, while rising above the taffrail was a stump mast, on which could be set a sail called a "driver."

In fact it was just such a craft as are often seen in the Gulf, excepting that this shallop possessed an unusual breadth of beam, was remarkably trim-looking, sharp in the bows, spread more canvas than was usual in vessels of her class, and had every indication of being thoroughly seaworthy and a very fast sailer.

Upon the deck were three men, lying half asleep under an awning, and who lazily opened their eyes as Nick Nabob and his visitor boarded and entered the cabin, and then resumed their *siesta* once more.

"I hasn't got man-o'-war quarters, Master Howard, to entertain yer in, but I has some as good wine as ever dodged ther Customs, an' some real Havana cigarittos, such as ther Cuban señoritters uses ter hide ther blushes behind ther smoke; a little o' this will do you good," and Nick poured out a glass of wine, which Howard eagerly quaffed, for he felt the need of it.

The cabin was not an uncomfortable one by any means, and seating himself in an easy-chair, Howard said earnestly:

"Nick, you said that Lucille—that is, Miss Marsden, was a prisoner on the Wreckers' Island?"

"True, sir, she and the Tudors, and half a dozen men-folks."

"Have they been subjected to any indignities?"

"Lord, no, sir; they dwell in the prisoners' cabin up among the rocks, and has plenty to eat and drink, only the captain hasn't decided to ransom 'em yet, knowin' they could tell some unpleasant stories about the Beacon, and he wants ter git rich fust."

"And who is this captain?"

"He's a young Cuban, as pretty as a girl, and as devilish as a snake; but the real chief o' all is Don Diablo."

"Don Diablo! why is he a wrecker, too?"

"Well, he sails deep water and cuts throats, but he is really chief o' the band, and frequently brings his booty to the island for us to run in and sell for him; you see he found us out, and we had to join the Buccaneer League, or he would have strung us up, for we are only about twenty on Abaco."

"Aha! and you all believed he was dead?"

"Certain, sir; and the captain—his name is Valdos—will be sorry he isn't, for the Blue Wave's cargo will have to be shared with him."

"And you are the skipper of this shallop?"

"Yes, Master Howard."

"And came here with the Blue Wave's cargo to dispose of?"

"Yes, sir; an old Jew, Jacobi Douro, is our agent here."

"Ha! Jacobi Douro?"

"You knows him, then, sir?"

"Yes," and Howard added, mentally: "Now I can understand why, a receiver of pirates' booty, he was so willing to allow his daughter to marry El Pirata, with whom he doubtless had business of an outlaw nature."

"We has an agent in Orleans, another in Havana and Pensacola, where we gets rid o' Don Diablo's booty and the cargoes o' wrecked craft."

"It is a nefarious transaction, Nick, and I cannot believe that you care to remain what you are."

"You has got me so you can rake me, sir, if it was yer natur', for I has told yer all; but I

don't like the business, sir, and that is why I said I would go with you on a cruise."

"Then you shall, and we will work together; what if I told you that it was to hunt down this very Don Diablo and the wreckers, that I intended going upon when I met you?"

"But you are not in the navy, you said, sir?"

"No; but I have money enough to fit out a craft, and I owe this Don Diablo a little grudge, which one day I may tell you, Nick; and more, the maiden, Miss Marsden, whom the wrecker, Valdós, holds prisoner, is my promised bride—"

"Oh, no!"

"It is true; she sailed on the Blue Wave, in company with Colonel Tudor and family for New York, and it is believed that the vessel foundered in a gale, and all on board were lost."

"Now tell me, Nick, do you wish to go with me and hunt down these wretches, or still continue what you are—*worse than a pirate?*"

"I hate to go back on my messmates, sir."

"Do you call those your messmates who without the courage to meet their foes, lure vessels to destruction, and laugh while their crews drown before their eyes?" sternly said Howard.

"You paint a black picture of them, Master Howard; but it's a true one I can't gainsay."

"You can be invaluable to me, and your reward shall be great; enough to allow you to pass your latter days in comfort and living an honest life, instead of dying at the yard-arm, as will be your fate if you still continue your present vile life."

"You argifies like a Boston lawyer, Master Howard, an' I guesses I is guilty."

"You are guilty, Nick; but you can wipe out the past by deeds of honor and daring in the future."

"Then I'm on deck, sir; how'll you head?"

"First, how can I rescue Miss Marsden and her friends from the island?"

"It will have to be done by strategy, for the guards have orders to kill 'em all, if a strange vessel comes in shoreward, whose colors don't agree with our signals."

"Then by strategy I will free them; when do you sail?"

"To-night, sir."

"I will go with you as a common hand; what say you?"

"All right, sir; I'll ship yer for ther fore-castle, as I needs another hand, one having been lost coming over in a blow; but it is risky."

"I care not for risks, and once on the island we can plan some way to get the prisoners on board this shallop and put to sea."

"All right, Master Howard, I believe we can; now, sir, I'll row you ashore, and while I come back, you can change your toggery, and to-night I'll meet you at the Havana *pulperia* in the town, and will bring you off with me as a new hand."

"A good idea, and I will disguise myself as a Mexican man-of-war's-man, and I am a deserter."

"You has a great head, Master Howard—No, no, that won't do, for your name is Pecho now."

"Yes, my name is Pecho," answered Howard De Vigne, with a smile, and leaving the shallop, Nick Nabob set him ashore once more, without the shallop's crew having seen his face.

Several hours after the shallop set sail for the Wrecker's Island, and few eyes would have been sharp enough to recognize, in the clean-shaven, short-haired sailor in Mexican man-of-war's uniform, at the helm of the little craft, the dashing, handsome Howard De Vigne.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LOVE STORY.

It was a balmy, beautiful night, when the little lugger gained an offing out of the Black Lagoon, and putting her helm to the starboard, headed along the coast, with New Orleans the point of destination.

As it would not be safe to steer boldly across the Gulf for the Balize, where El Pirata expected to get passage by some vessel up the Mississippi to New Orleans, Soto was given orders to run up the coast, keeping the land in view, that in case of sighting an enemy, some inlet, lagoon or river might afford a safe retreat, should they be pursued.

Several days had the lugger glided along over the blue waters, with the land visible off the port quarter, and Tampico had been left astern, when Luiz, the son of Soto the Fisherman, sung out, just as the sun sunk from view in the west:

"Sail ho!"

The cry aroused El Pirata from a *siesta* on the deck, and he sprang to his feet with alacrity, and quickly turned his gaze in the direction indicated by Luiz.

There, a couple of leagues ahead, just coming out from the land, and heading straight out into the Gulf, was visible a schooner, which caused El Pirata to call hastily to Soto to come to him.

"That is my schooner, Soto, I would swear to it among a thousand."

"What, señor capitán, the Sea Gipsy?"

"Yes; I cannot be mistaken."

"I only saw your vessel at night, and cannot tell, señor; but your eye is a true one."

"Yes, it is the Sea Gipsy, and I would give much to take her from the hands of that accursed Don Diablo; but alas! that cannot be, Soto, for my wings are clipped now; but they do not discover us."

"Or doing so, señor, care little for our poor lugger, expecting to get no richer. Ah, if Don Diablo but knew that your most precious jewel was here with you, quickly would he alter his course; shall we continue on, señor capitán?"

"Yes, for he stands straight out to sea," and shaking his fist at the schooner, he continued in a low tone:

"Go on, Don Diablo, leaving a red wake behind you; but, if I mistake not thy days are numbered, for there is one on your track that will hunt you down, though once he set you free."

"If I thought not so, base devil that you are, never would I have pledged myself to leave the sea until I strung you up to the yard-arm, for I have not forgotten my first love, poor Nita Sabinas, whom you dragged from home and friends, won by thy accursed fascinations to still cling to thee, though she knew thee in all thy villainy— Ah, Consuelo, have you come up to breathe this balmy air?" and he turned to his young and beautiful bride, who just then came on deck.

"Yes, Jack, I came to enjoy the balmy evening, and to be near you; but your face is dark and stern: why is it?"

"The bitterness of my heart was reflected in my face, Consuelo; I was thinking of the past, called up by sight of yonder schooner, upon which the rays of the setting sun are falling now."

"I see her; the canvas looks like burnished gold."

"True, and for gold her master kills, and sins; Consuelo, that vessel is the Sea Gipsy."

"What! Oh, El Pirata, quickly turn in flight from that man," and the young wife's face turned deadly pale.

"Do not fear, Consuelo, for he sees us not, or seeing, heeds not; see, he stands out into the open water, for we are too poor to tempt him, he thinks."

"If he but knew, Jack."

"If we all but knew the heart-aches, loves, hatred and pleasures waiting for us, Consuelo, how different would be the lives we lead."

"My husband, how sad you seem to-night; tell me what it is that brings sadness to your heart," and Consuelo laid her tiny hand upon his arm, and, with a sigh, he said:

"I will tell you, Consuelo, the thoughts called up by that man's presence near me."

"You I have known two years, and do you remember our first meeting that I met you at the citadel ball?"

"Well do I remember it, Jack; never can I forget it," she said, passionately.

"Well, before I met you, bright jewel of my heart, I had met and loved another."

The woman started, but his low, deep voice calmed her, as he went on:

"I had been a sad adventurer, wandering from land to land, and sea to sea, and talking love into tiny ears, looking adoration into dreamy eyes, and yet meaning neither word nor look."

"At last I met a fair young girl, whose life I saved; it was at a theater in my native land, where I had gone one night *pour passer le temps*; she was seated in the box, with several friends, and her beauty and innocence had attracted my gaze."

"I saw that she was a foreigner, for her style was like yours, Consuelo, and her dark eyes won my attention far more than did the play."

"Presently there rung through the theater the cry of fire, and almost immediately volumes of smoke filled the building."

"At once all was dismay and excitement, for women shrieked, men groaned, and only a few brave voices tried to command order and system, and aid in saving human life."

"Of one only did I think, and she was in the box, and thither I made my way, guided by instinct rather than sight, for the smoke was blinding and suffocating."

"At last I reached it, and, as I at first believed, found it empty; but no, a soft voice cried piteously:

"Save me!"

"It was her voice, and she was crouching in the corner, her friends having deserted her, or believed she was with them."

"I have come to save you, or die with you," I said, in reply, and I took her in my arms."

"But where to go for safety was the question, and cut off below, I ascended the stairs to the galleries above, leaving the surging, shrieking, groaning, dying mass of humanity below me."

"I reached the second tier, toward which the flames were rapidly climbing, knowing if I gained the roof I could escape along the tops of the adjacent houses, which I knew to be next to the theater."

"And I reached the ladder leading to the skylight, dashed the glass into fragments, and sprang out with the maiden in my arms, and thoroughly conscious."

"But alas! on one side, the houses had already ignited, and my only chance was the adjacent building to the left."

"But the smoke was blinding, the heat intense, the roar of the flames terrible, and the streets full of a shouting mass of horrified people, and I feared the brain of my fair charge would go mad; but fortunately there had been carpenters at work repairing the house, upon the roof of which I sprang from the top of the theater, and two long ropes hung from the chimney, over the eaves to the sidewalk."

"A sailor, I had no fear for myself; but could she cling to me in the descent?"

"I feared not, and, with my sash, for I was in full uniform, I bound her to me, placed her hands upon my shoulders, and telling her to have no dread of the result, swung over on the rope."

"I was desecrated by hundreds in the street, and one great shout for success went up; but they knew not that I was a sailor, and how great my strength was, and feared I would fall; but I felt no dread of the result, and reached the ground in safety."

"Poor girl, she had fainted when she found herself swinging in mid-air, and I bore her to her hotel, where I found her distracted mother, into whose hands I gave her, while I went in search of her father, who had gone to the theater, expecting to bring back her dead body."

"Well, Consuelo, from that night I loved her; but, alas! she already loved."

"She was a Cuban girl, the daughter of a wealthy planter, and at her home I afterward visited her; but though she regarded me as a brother, she loved another with all the passionate ardor of her nature."

"And, Consuelo, instead of being the noble man she believed him, he was the basest of the base, and cruelly deceived her."

"But, through all she clung to him, until, at last, he deserted her, and she became—alas! I know not what."

"But, Consuelo, the man who thus deceived poor Nita Sabinas, was none other than Don Diablo."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A SURPRISE.

THROUGH the whole story of the first love of El Pirata, Consuelo had listened with breathless attention; but when he told her who had been the one who had taken Nita Sabinas from him, she started, and said, earnestly:

"And that man nearly kept you from me, Jack, for my father knew him not at first as the evil Don Diablo, and believed him only a smuggler, and when he was asked for my hand almost consented; but his fascination to me was that of the snake, and in spite of his handsome appearance, his winning manner and musical voice, I felt ever as if the hiss of the serpent was in my ears when he was near me."

"Then you did not love him, Consuelo?"

"No; you were my first, and will be my only love, for without you I would wish to die, as did my mother."

"She met and loved my father; you know what he is, and how little he is like the men of our race."

"She was a Catholic, and a Mexican, and she fled from her home to become his wife."

"She found out that gold was his god, and that he made riches off of the misery and misfortunes, ay, the lives of others, and it broke her heart, and she died when I was a mere child."

"I have now given up my creed for you, and if I lose you, if I find you to be what I believe you not to be, then I too wish to die, for my heart will break."

He drew her toward him and told her that his whole heart was her own, and that his love for Nita Sabinas was a dream of the past.

He pictured to her a happy home in the United States, where they could live and grow old together, for he was tired of wandering, and wanted rest; but, as he spoke, an icy hand seemed grasping at his heart, and he felt that between the future and himself arose a wall he could not look over, and at his very feet seemed to yawn an open grave.

But, back into the depths of his heart he pressed these forebodings of evil to come, and drew his beautiful bride nearer to him.

And thus they sat far into the night, while the lugger moved steadily along over the dark waters, with little to dread, for the schooner had long since disappeared far out over the night-clad waters.

"Sail ho!" suddenly came a startled cry from Soto, who stood at the helm, and there was no need for any one to ask whereaway, for right astern, not half a mile distant, like a sea-phantom, was visible a large vessel, coming swiftly along under a cloud of canvas.

"Great God! it is the Sea Gipsy; she has doubled on us," cried El Pirata, and he mentally cursed himself for not having glanced astern occasionally.

But regrets for negligent watching were useless, and action was needed, and quickly the

ligger was spread with canvas, her helm was put to the starboard, and right before the wind she headed for the shore.

But the land was a league and a half distant, and the Sea Gipsy was not half a mile astern, so the chances of escape were one in a hundred; but El Pirata was determined to risk that chance, for surrender meant death, and resistance would be utter madness.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE DEATH BEACON.

I WILL now return to the little shallop in which Howard De Vigne risked his life as a common seaman to go to the Wreckers' Island, where he was determined to make some daring attempt to rescue the woman whom he had so long believed dead, but who was suffering a living death in the power of outlaws.

Knowing that their skipper, Nick Nabob, had intended shipping a trustworthy seaman in Vera Cruz, the crew of the shallop looked with no suspicion upon Howard De Vigne, and learning that the two had, in former years, been shipmates, they did not wonder that they were good friends; besides, Pedro, as the young American was called, had gained their friendship in many little ways, and was always most obliging in anything he could aid them in, while at night, when the little craft was gliding along, he was wont to play on a Spanish guitar and sing for them in a voice that had won applause in many a refined assemblage.

After a rapid run the shallop approached the vicinity of the Abaco, where many a vessel had been lured to destruction by the false beacons set on stormy nights by the wreckers.

Upon the deck, at the helm, stood Nick Nabob, and by his side was Howard De Vigne, and the two had been for some time conversing together in a low tone, while the other three men of the crew were forward.

"Yonder rises the Hole in the Wall, Pedro," said Nick, who, for fear of mistakes when not on his guard, called Howard by his assumed name at all times.

"I see it, and, as if Satan was ever ready to help his own, a storm is coming up with the darkness, and yonder is a large vessel standing toward Abaco," answered De Vigne.

"You are right, and it will reach there just when the storm is at its height, and will follow this false beacon to destruction; this is a bad business, sir," answered Nick.

"A bad business indeed, Nick; but, if our plans work right, this Death Beacon will soon be put out forever."

"I hopes so, for I is almost gettin' ter feel as though I were a worse man than ever Cain was as slew Goliath, or somebody else, for I forgets Scripture awful quick, altho' my old mammy beat it into me with a club; but this storm is sweeping up rapid, and we must be careful ourselves; forward there, lads!"

"Ay, ay," sung out the three men in chorus. "Better reef close, and get all ship-shape, fer we is goin' ter have a blow."

The men quickly obeyed, Howard springing to aid them with alacrity, and by the time the shallop was stripped to meet the gale, it was upon them, and darkness with it.

With the suddenness with which the hurricanes of southern latitudes arise, the storm broke upon the little shallop; but Nick Nabob, whatever might be his sins, was a thorough seaman, and handled the craft in a manner that won the admiration of Howard De Vigne, who was aiding him at the tiller, while the others of the crew crouched forward, ready to be of service when needed.

"Ha! there opens the English Light," suddenly cried Howard, as a bright gleam was visible across the rough waters.

"No, no, that is *our* light," was Nick Nabob's reply.

"Do you mean it, that the Death Beacon, as the wreckers call their light, is the one we see?" asked Howard, in surprise.

"Yes, as you will see; do you notice how I head?"

"Yes, you keep the bowsprit pointed right at the beacon."

"You is right; but keep yer eyes open for awhile, and see what change I make."

Howard De Vigne did as directed; but, after some time had elapsed, in which the shallop bounded madly on through the vortex of waters, something prompted him to glance astern, and at once a startled exclamation broke from his lips, for, flying on the same course as themselves, and but a short distance away, following in their wake, was a vessel under close-reefed sails.

The cry of Howard De Vigne caused not only Nick Nabob, but also the three seamen forward, to look astern, and their eyes also fell upon the strange craft.

"Great God! it is the vessel we saw at sunset, and it's headin' fer ruin," cried Nick Nabob.

"Can nothing be done to save her?" anxiously asked Howard De Vigne.

"No, nothing."

"But she is following in *our* wake," persisted Howard.

"And we are leading her upon the rocks."

"Then why not hard-down your helm, and change your course?"

"Couldn't do it here, for sand hills, reefs and rocky islands are all around us; don't you see how I am heading?"

"Straight for the English Light."

"I say it is ther Death Beacon."

"Well, straight for the Death Beacon; what then?"

"If I hold on ten minutes more as I am, I'll go on ther rocks."

"Well?"

"I don't intend to go on ther rocks; but, when I hear ther breakers, then I'll hard-a-starboard my helm, until I count sixty, and then hold on as before, pointing the bowsprit just three points away from the light, and that will run me through the only channel in the reef, and which isn't wide enough for two crafts like this to go in abeam."

"And the vessel astern, Nick?"

"Will run straight on the reef, though God knows I wish 'twasn't so."

Howard De Vigne glanced anxiously astern at the vessel, now not far distant, and evidently following the shallop, believing it a coaster, running to some well-known harbor into which it could follow in safety.

Then he said:

"Suppose that vessel could go right about, which with the wind on its quarter as it is, it could do; what then?"

"If it kept the light dead astern, mind you, dead astern, it would run back into safe water."

Howard made no reply, but taking the night-glass and opening it, he cried suddenly:

"Good God! Nick Nabob, yonder craft is the Vidette!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE DEATH STRUGGLE.

THE words of Howard De Vigne, uttered in thrilling tones, caused Nick Nabob to utter a startled exclamation, for well he knew that the Vidette was a war-vessel of his own country, and that, unintentional though it might be, he was leading it to wreck, and its gallant crew to death.

"In Heaven's name! what can we do?" cried Nick, in terror.

"She must be saved," shouted Howard, with stern determination.

"But how?"

"Any way! put about and warn them."

"I dare not put about, for she would run us down. Great God! I fear she's gone."

"Never!" and Howard faced about and gazed upon the coming vessel, now not a cable's length away, and her crew were busy shortening sail, that it might not run by the shallop and thus lose her for a pilot, for they little dreamed that a few moments more would hurl them upon the rocks.

And, as Howard De Vigne thus stood, striving to devise some means to save the noble vessel, whose deck he had once trod as an officer, there suddenly arose from the three voices ahead in chorus, the startling cry:

"Breakers ahead!"

"Ay, ay," shouted Nick Nabob, throwing his whole weight upon the tiller to put it a-starboard.

And then, in clear ringing tones, that had arisen above many a storm and roar of battle, came the words:

"Ho, the Vidette! breakers ahead! hard-a-starboard your helm! hard, I say! ready about!"

"Ay, ay," came from the vessel-of-war, as promptly her bows swept round, and then again arose the stern, ringing cry:

"That light is a false beacon! Keep it dead astern! dead astern, I say! or you are lost!"

"Ay, ay," again came from the Vidette, as she swept round, as though on a pivot, and then was heard the question:

"Who are you?"

"Howard De Vigne!"

And then, before more could be said, and while the Vidette was flying back in the opposite direction, the shallop suddenly bounded into a vortex of waters, and torrents of foam fell upon her decks from either side, as she flew like a frightened bird through the narrow channel in the reef.

But, while the decks were yet washed with incoming waves, three dark forms came aft, and two of them suddenly sprung upon Howard De Vigne, who, taken by surprise, was dragged down, and instantly a fierce struggle began, while one cried savagely in Spanish:

"Kill the traitor dog!"

"Caramba! I will," was the fierce reply, and Nick Nabob, who had been startled out of his usual coolness by Howard's daring warning, deserted the tiller and left the shallop to take care of itself, and sprung to the aid of his friend in the unequal struggle.

But, as he reached the spot, his sheath-knife in hand, two forms suddenly arose from the deck, and one said earnestly:

"You were right, Pedro, to warn that brave ship, and I would not see them kill you."

It was Antonio, one of the three men of the shallop's crew, that spoke, and his knife was stained with blood.

"Ha! they are both dead," cried Nick Nabob.

"Yes, Nick, they attacked me, and I killed that one with his own knife," was the cool reply of Howard De Vigne, as he touched the dead Spaniard with his foot.

"And I killed Rosas," added Antonio.

"And you saved my life, my friend, and you will find you have done that which will serve you well," and Howard held forth his hand, which Antonio grasped, and said as he did so:

"I am glad, for I am sick at heart of too much killing all the time."

"Well said, Antonio; but now toss these bodies into the sea, and mind yer, they was washed over in the storm when we passed through ther reef, and, ef any cur'us eyes has seen us layin' to, why they had ther helm," remarked Nick Nabob, as he once more took the tiller, while Howard De Vigne, after hurling the dead Spaniards overboard, sprang to the sheet-ropes, for the little shallop was pitching wildly, and only her stanch build prevented her foundering when she broached to.

But she was quickly gotten on her way once more, and then Howard turned to look for the Vidette; but nowhere was she visible through the darkness and storm, and the shallop held on her way for some minutes longer, and then ran into a small basin, with sheltering rocks towering upon each side, and forming a safe and secret retreat, for a vessel no larger than the wreckers' craft.

"Here, Antonio, you go ashore, and see if Pedro's warning to the Vidette was heard by any one on ther look-out; if so, give us a signal, by droppin a stone inter ther basin from the rocks above, and we'll put to sea again, for they'd kill him sure ef they knowed it, and you kin tell 'em you jumped overboard, and they won't hurt you."

"If it wasn't heard, then come back to ther shallop an' let us know, and by being friends with Pedro here, you can make more money and be more honest than at this devilish work."

"All right, señor; you may trust me," answered Antonio.

"We have just had proof of that, *amigo*," replied Howard De Vigne, and he watched the wrecker as he sprang overboard and swam ashore, while Nick Nabob headed the shallop seaward, to run at a moment's notice out of the secret basin, should they receive a signal from Antonio warning them of danger.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A PRIZE.

"RAMILEZ, take the glass and see what you make of that craft," and Don Diablo, as he stood on the deck of the beautiful craft he had so cleverly and daringly captured, handed his spy-glass to his lieutenant, who, as the reader will remember, had, with equal cleverness and boldness, put the officer of Captain Jack Waldron out of the way, and played the part of a friend that he might betray.

The Mexican took a cigarette from between his lips, and turned the glass upon the craft referred to by his chief and answered, after a moment:

"It looks strangely like a lugger I have seen about Vera Cruz, and upon which the suspicion of smuggling has fallen, señor."

"So I think, and I shall speak him."

"It will be impossible if he wishes to avoid us, señor, as he will fly for the lagoons, where we cannot follow."

"True, but I shall play a trick upon him, Ramirez; that is, stand on as I am, with just a little leaning westward, until night comes on, and then follow in his wake, keeping close inshore, and thus overhaul him."

And this was the way in which the Sea Gipsy managed to suddenly appear in the wake of the lugger, which at once headed for the shore under all sail.

But the Sea Gipsy had the advantage, and sent a shot after the flying craft that fell into the sea within a fathom of her bows, and sent showers of spray upon her decks.

"Shall I come to, señor?" asked Soto.

"No," was the stern answer of El Pirata, as he stepped aft and took the helm, where Consuelo followed him, for she refused to leave the deck.

Flash!—bang! again rung the schooner's metal, and Soto said anxiously:

"They will knock us out of the water, captain," and he dodged low, as an iron shot flew just above his head.

"I will pay you for your lugger, good Soto, if she is hurt; if you are killed you will not need the money, and if I fall the señora will pay you," was the quiet response of El Pirata, and he passed one arm around Consuelo's waist, while his other hand held the tiller.

Forward, the two lanceros, who had deserted, were crouching in fear, while Luiz was carelessly watching the schooner.

Flash—bang! flash—bang!

"Ha! that is merry music by night, Consuelo," cried El Pirata, his spirits rising with the excitement of the chase.

"But rather dangerous, Jack," responded Consuelo, calmly, for she had not shown the slightest sign of fear.

"Not so dangerous as it would be for us on yonder craft, Consuelo, nor will death by shot be so fearful as what Don Diablo will visit upon me, while a fate worse than—"

"No, no! sooner would I die by your hand, Jack, than face that man."

"While there is life there is hope, Consuelo—ah, there goes our bowsprit; too bad! too bad! for now we have no hope of escape," and El Pirata spoke with the utmost coolness as he brought the lugger to, and released the helm.

Finding that all hope of escape was gone, Consuelo threw herself weeping into the arms of El Pirata, who now, with Soto and the others calmly awaited the result.

Like a huge white bird of prey, the schooner came flying over the waters, and, the sea being comparatively calm, was skillfully laid alongside the lugger.

"Come aboard here, my gallant captain, and let me see what mischief you are up to," sternly ordered Don Diablo, and Soto clambered over the bulwarks of the schooner and faced the noted pirate chief, for, acting from a sudden impulse, El Pirata had suddenly sprung down into the cabin of the lugger, dragging Consuelo after him.

"Well, señor, what can I do for you?" asked Soto, with politeness, trying to shield his face as much as possible from Don Diablo.

"Whither bound, señor captain?"

"To Galveston."

"Where from?"

"Vera Cruz."

"What cargo?"

"In ballast, for I am going after a cargo, señor."

"What is your craft worth to you?"

"It is all I have."

"Where is the gold with which to purchase your cargo?"

"It is already bought, señor."

"There was a woman on board," whispered Ramirez in the ear of his chief, who then asked:

"Any passengers?"

"Yes, señor."

"Who, and what are they?"

"A gentleman, his wife, and two servants."

"Ah! I guess he is able to pay his ransom; but, why is it you so persistently hide your face, señor?"

Soto made no reply, and, grasping his arm, Don Diablo drew him toward him, and, raising a battle-lantern, looked into his face for an instant, and then said, with a sneer:

"Aha, Señor Soto, the Fisherman of the Black Lagoon, I know you now; and, if I mistake not, your passengers are Captain Jack Waldron, and one Howard De Vigne."

"Ramirez, bring those men on deck."

But ere the lieutenant could obey, El Pirata, who had heard all, stepped from the lugger's cabin, and, followed by the faithful Consuelo, came upon the deck of the schooner, while he said, calmly:

"I am here, Don Diablo, but Lieutenant De Vigne is not, as you will one day discover; this lady is my wife."

"*Nombre de Dios!* it is you, Jack Waldron, El Pirata, Castilla, the Corsair, or whatever else they call you; yes, you, indeed, my rival on the sea, who so kindly furnished me this beautiful vessel," and there was a tone of devilish triumph in the voice of Don Diablo.

"Yes, I am your rival, and your foe, Don Diablo," was El Pirata's fearless response.

"I am glad of that, for I love foes and hate enemies, and—Sainted Maria! do I look into the sweetest face I ever knew, the fair Consuelo Douro?"

"No, I am the Señora Waldron, Don Diablo, the pirate," replied Consuelo, in stinging tones.

"Ha! ha! ha! and you lay great stress upon pirate, señorita, when you have just said you were the wife of one," sneered the chief.

"Circumstances he could not control made my husband a free rover; but never could he be the human monster you are."

"Take care, my pirate's bride, that you do not go too far, as your outlaw husband has no power to protect you, and I am in no pleasant mood with him for stealing from me my bride, as I intended you should one day be."

"Never! sooner would I have died by my own hand," groaned poor Consuelo.

"You may one day have the choice of bridegrooms—Death or Don Diablo, and we shall see which you shall choose; Señor Ramirez, place El Pirata in irons, and give the señora the guest's state-room in my cabin," said Don Diablo, with mock politeness.

"No, I will go with my husband," said Consuelo, firmly.

"Your husband! the word seems a honied morsel between your lips; in fact, it is a sweet word for all women, Señora Pirata, as I must call you, not knowing what name your husband was married under; but if I said irons for you, too, would you prefer them to the schooner's cabin?"

"Yes; what he suffers I can suffer; what he braves I can brave."

"Well said, but we shall see; Señor Ramirez, put the lugger's crew in irons, unless they wish to man our guns, and set the little craft adrift, after you knock a hole in her hull; then rig a

plank for El Pirata and his sweet wife to take a walk on."

"Good God! do you mean that my poor wife shall suffer as I do, monster?" cried El Pirata, in a tone of horror, but fearing for Consuelo, not himself.

"Yes; she wishes to be with you, and she shall follow you to the depths of the sea," was the inhuman reply.

"So be it; I am content to die with you, my husband; it is but a moment of agony, and then sweet rest forever," and not one atom of fear did the brave woman exhibit, as she placed her hand in her husband's arm.

"True, Consuelo, I am content; better that you die with me, no matter how terrible the death, than that you remain in the presence of this inhuman fiend."

"Come, Don Diablo, rig your plank, for we are ready to walk to death with far bolder mien than you will show when you come to stand beneath the gallows."

"By Heaven! but you show a bold front; we will see if we cannot wring cries of mercy from your lips; come, Ramirez, hasten and rig two planks to leeward, and side by side, and muster the crew to witness execution," and Don Diablo's face was black with passion, and quivering with triumphant joy at having in his power the woman who had scorned him and the man who had been his daring rival.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WALKING THE PLANK.

"ALL ready, señor chief," and Ramirez saluted Don Diablo, as he came aft and reported that the planks had been rigged for execution.

The lugger had in the mean time been scuttled and set adrift, and already had sunk beneath the waves while the schooner was lying to, a league or more from shore, and her crew had been mustered in four long lines to witness the execution, not one of them daring to raise a voice against the inhuman deed of their chief, though a number held bitter thoughts against the cruel monster.

"Is all ready?" asked Don Diablo, coming from his cabin, where he had been examining the papers and valuables taken from the lugger, and cursing his enemy for having placed all his money in drafts on New Orleans, payable only to Consuelo in person, and which was one of Jacob's cunning acts, to prevent loss, in case of capture or death.

"We are ready, thou appropriately named Don of Hades," said El Pirata, while in a voice equally as firm Consuelo added:

"Ay, do your worst; we are ready to meet death, come in what shape it may."

"I shall see; place the irons and weights upon them," was the stern response, and, in obedience to a motion from the Señor Ramirez, a brawny, fearless-faced seaman stepped toward Consuelo and arranged about her delicate wrists a heavy chain which extended to her feet, and was then clasped around her shapely ankles.

Then a twenty-four pound shot was attached by a short chain, and she was ready for the fearful plunge into eternity; but through all not a quiver of her lips showed that she feared to meet death.

The seaman then performed a like duty with El Pirata, whose fearless smile showed how little dread he felt of death, and a connecting chain bound the man and woman together.

But in arranging this chain there seemed to arise some little difficulty, and in a low tone, which, at a distance, seemed like a muttered oath, the seaman said something to El Pirata.

It may have been imagination, but Don Diablo, who was closely watching the face of his foe, thought he saw him start, and his face flush, and asked, with a sneer:

"Does an oath so startle you, El Pirata, or is it fear that causes your face to flush?"

"I have no fear, Don Diablo, and hence enjoy your disappointment at not forcing a cry of mercy from even this poor child's lips; but we are ready to die."

"I have changed my mind, my dear captain, for as it is a disappointment for me not to see you beg for mercy, I lose my pleasure in your death, so shall spare your wife, to see you walk to your death."

These words of the wicked chief brought a shriek of anguish from Consuelo, who would have fallen to the deck, had not the seaman, who had placed the irons upon her, caught her in his strong arms.

"Knock off her irons, Morgan!" commanded Don Diablo, and after some difficulty it was done.

"Now, señora, let me see if you can show the same courage in gazing upon your husband walking to his doom as when you believed you were to accompany him."

"Ha! ha! ha! how sweet in my ears sounded your shriek just now."

"Then I shall deprive you of your pleasure, sir pirate; my husband has told you he is ready to die, and I am ready to see him meet his fate as a brave man should."

A murmur of applause went over the crew, but was silenced by a scowl of Don Diablo, who winced at the nerve of the woman, and turned

to El Pirata, whose face had become fearfully pallid, since he knew that he was to leave Consuelo in the hands of his foe; but otherwise he showed no emotion.

"Perhaps you, my gallant captain, may not meet death so bravely, now that your wife remains under my protection."

"Her fate is in her own hands, Don Diablo, and again I tell you that I am ready to die."

"Raise him upon that plank!" was the angry order of the chief, and it was quickly obeyed.

"Now, sir, have you aught to say?"

"Farewell, Consuelo, my loved wife," came in clear, distinct tones from the doomed man's lips, and, turning to the chief, he cried:

"Don Diablo, inhuman fiend that you are, warn you that death follows in your wake."

Then, with quick, bold step, he walked forward, carrying in his ironed hands the heavy shot that hung by a chain to his feet, and the next instant took the fatal plunge, and the dark waters closed over him.

And down to the deck, without a moan or cry, sunk poor Consuelo in a swoon, for at last even her brave self-control had broken down.

"Carry her into the cabin, Ramirez, and send that accursed American surgeon to her, and tell him if she does herself harm on her recovery I will string him up to the topmast as a pennant."

"To work there, you hounds of Satan, and get sail on the schooner, and don't stand gaping around as though you had seen El Pirata's ghost arise from the waters."

The stern order of their chief sent the men flying to their posts, and five minutes after the Sea Gipsy was flying away from the fatal scene.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE WRECKERS' ISLAND.

CALM and patiently, come what might, Nick Nabob and Howard De Vigne awaited the return of Antonio from his mission to see if the voice of the young American had been heard, warning the Vidette of its danger.

After an absence of half an hour Antonio returned to the sandy beach at the base of the rocks, and called out:

"Hol the shallop!"

"Ay, ay! is that you, Antonio?" answered Nick.

"Yes; come on shore."

This was satisfactory, if Antonio had not turned traitor, and Nick Nabob and Howard De Vigne rowed to the sandy point in the shallop's boat, and were there met by the wrecker.

"The lads are all in the cabins, señor, playing cards, and the look-out preferred the shelter of the rocks, for he did not even see the cruiser or the shallop come in."

"Good! Now we'll go and report to Valdós, and, Antonio, if you are certain, mind you, lad, certain you know any one of the band ter side with us three in a pinch, just pump him for all he's worth, an' give him an idea that he can make a round sum by sailin' in our company."

"I'll do it, señor; good-night," and Antonio turned off toward the cabins of the wreckers, while Nick Nabob, accompanied by Howard De Vigne, went to seek Valdós, the wrecker captain.

A walk of a couple of hundred yards brought them to a narrow glen, which widened as it extended back into the island, and presented a few signs of fertility; but at the most the home of the wreckers was a barren retreat for even men in their wild, cruel calling, and especially for captives in their power.

"There's Valdós's hut, and yonder up ther glen, where you see those lights, is ther cabins of ther captives, and there's a guard allus walking fore and aft in front o' ther quarters, though why Valdós only knows, as there is but two craft in the basin besides the shallop fit to put to sea in, and somebody sleeps on 'em every night, so you see the chances of slipping cable out o' this island is slim," said Nick, in a whisper, as they drew near the door of the cabin of Valdós.

"Hold on! hark!" said Howard De Vigne, as Nick was about to rap on the door, and voices were heard within, and the two, listening, could not but hear every word that was said.

"Well, Colonel Tudor, you know my terms, but that there may be no mistake I will repeat them again," said a voice, and Nick whispered to Howard that it was Valdós speaking.

Then another, in deep, earnest tones, replied:

"You can save yourself the trouble, wrecker, for I know them; you demand for my ransom twenty-five thousand dollars in gold, for my daughter fifteen thousand and for my wife ten thousand."

"Yes, fifty thousand pesos in all, and as you are a very rich man you can pay it, and the day your draft returns paid you are free to go, for I expect my shallop back daily, and will send the Señor Nabob to Pensacola for the money."

"What guarantee have I that you will keep your word and release us?"

"My oath."

"The oath of such a man as you are is like the wind," was the contemptuous retort.

"Yet you have to take it, if you care for your freedom: I tell you I am tired of this life, and wish to get gold enough to live in luxury in a

foreign land, and, with what I have laid by, and I get from you, I will be rich, and will break up this Wreckers' League."

"It is worth the fifty thousand if only for that result, and I will give you the draft; but, for the ransom of Miss Marsden I will pay a like sum."

"No, Colonel Tudor, gold cannot buy her freedom, for I love her, and she shall become my wife, willing or unwilling."

At these words Howard De Vigne started forward, as though to dash into the cabin and face the man who thus referred to the woman he loved; but the grasp of Nick Nabob was upon him, while the wrecker whispered, sternly: "Don't, Pedro, or you will ruin all."

"True, my good friend; I will bide my time," and again they listened with rapt attention.

"Have you no pity, Señor Valdós?" asked Colonel Tudor, whom the reader will recall as the person under whose care Lucille Marsden was going North at the time of the wreck of the Blue Wave.

"My love is stronger than my pity," was the cool reply.

"And would you force a young and innocent girl to marry such a wretch as you know yourself to be, for there is no need of mincing words, Valdós?"

"Yes, I love her, nay, I worship her, and I am not ill-favored; I was reared a gentleman, and if she will marry me I will give up my evil life, and, in another land, devote myself wholly to making her happy."

"Never will she consent to so degrade herself."

"She must."

"I say no."

"Well, how can it be helped, as she is in my power?"

"I will give you a draft for one hundred thousand dollars for her freedom."

"No, gold will not buy a gem so precious, which I have destined to wear in my heart; but, by the way, my dear Colonel Tudor, as you seem to have such a good bank account, just make your draft for the ransom of yourself, wife and daughter one hundred thousand."

"Devil that you are, not one dollar will I give you; no, I will remain here with that poor girl, and not leave her in your hands, and my wife and Nellie will uphold me in my determination."

"Don't be silly, dear colonel, for you will only remain to see Lucille Marsden made my wife, and together we will depart from this island, leaving yourself and family among the wreckers."

"Oh, that I had the power to kill you; but with me dead, I know what would follow, and you cannot tempt me to attack you, devil that you are, and fitting tool of that fiend of the sea, Don Diablo, as I know you to be."

"Yes, he is chief, I admit, for he is stronger than I; he sweeps the seas in search of treasure, and I lure it to me by false beacons, and my wreckers owe allegiance to the Corsair League; but should his vessel visit here, as I expect it will, since I learn from my messenger from Pensacola that he was not hanged in New York, and is again afloat, I doubt if you will be able to furnish ransom enough for your beautiful daughter, for Don Diablo is a marrying man, Colonel Tudor, and has broken many a fair heart."

"And the gallows will one day break his neck and yours."

"I doubt it, for I don't believe that the Don or myself were born to be hanged or drowned; but, tell me, do you buy freedom for yourself and family at the sum I named?"

"No."

"Beware, colonel!"

"I care not for your threats."

"I warn you."

"I say no!"

"So be it; return to your quarters, señor," was the cold reply, and instantly Nick seized Howard De Vigne's arm, and they bounded away and sought shelter behind a rock near by, and saw the door open and a tall form come out of the cabin.

As soon as he had disappeared in the direction of the captives' quarters up the glen, Nick motioned to Howard to follow him, and the next moment he knocked at the door of the wrecker captain's cabin.

"Come in!"

The two men obeyed, and glancing up Valdós saw the sailing-master of his shallop, and cried out cheerily:

"Ahoy, old lad, it is you, is it?"

"Ay, ay, captain, and this is my shipmate, Pedro Sanchez, an old friend whose introduction to the 'cat' in the American service caused him to desert, and join us."

The pretended Pedro Sanchez saluted politely, and glanced furtively at the man before him.

But that glance was sufficient to show him a slender, wiry form, clad in velvet pants and jacket, a *la Mexican*, in style, and richly embroidered with gold lace; a white silk shirt, scarf of scarlet about his neck, and a sash of a like hue around his waist, completed his very

elegant costume, excepting a pair of worked slippers that incased his very small feet.

His hands were small and shapely, and the fingers of the right were filled with rings of great value, and a diamond of immense size and beauty glittered in his red silk scarf.

Upon the little finger of the left hand Howard De Vigne suddenly spied, with a start, the exact counterpart of the one given him by Don Diablo, and which had proven a luck-stone in his gambling scene in New York, and which, when he assumed the character of a common seaman, he had put out of sight with his money.

But the face of the man more attracted him, for it was effeminate in its beauty, and, but for a dark, silken mustache, would have been boyish.

The eyes were large, dreamy and full of expression, and the mouth full and determined, while it seemed ever to have a smile hovering about it.

His complexion was strangely fair, his cheeks tinged with color, and his hair was long, curling, and hung upon his shoulders; in fact, Valdós, the wrecker captain, was a man that looked as though he could be an angel, or a fiend, as his capricious humor suited him.

"I like a man with a crime to haunt him, Nick, for he is that much more to be depended upon in the life we lead; you are welcome, Pedro, and if Nabob needs more men on the shallop, he can have you."

"I does need more, captain, for I lost Ravel going over, and the storm to-night swept over two more as we came through the reef channel."

"The devil you say! Well, take what men you need, and I expect to have you go on another voyage soon."

"Now tell me how the booty sold?"

"It went well, captain, for it was a rich lot the Blue Wave carried; but did yer know that ther chief wasn't dead after all?"

"Yes, so I learned; Satan keeps his head out of the noose for some good cause, it seems; what did that accursed Jew, Jacobi, pay you?"

"Twelve thousand pesos, señor."

"And he will realize twice that, and one-fourth of the twelve goes to Don Diablo; well, storms are frequent now, and we may make a rich haul soon; give me the metal, Nick."

Nabob took up his bags of gold and placed them upon the table before Valdós, who glanced at the seals to see that the strings had not been broken, and placed them in a huge iron chest that stood in one end of his cabin.

As he turned the key and thrust it into his pocket, there came a deep boom, like a clap of thunder, and the three men started.

"It is a signal gun!" cried Valdós, as a second time the sound broke on their ears.

"Yes, a vessel is firing minute-guns for aid," answered Nick Nabob.

"Death will soon put the crew out of their misery, for the craft is doomed," and a joyous light came into the wrecker captain's eyes as he added in a low tone to himself:

"Perhaps to-night may add largely to my fortune."

"Good-night, captain; will see you in the morning," said Nick Nabob, and he turned toward the door.

"Good-night, Nick; get your crew all right again for another run; good-night, Pedro, and see that you do your duty, for we want no man in our band who fears to look death in the face, come as it may, or shrinks from seeing another man die."

"I'll not shrink when the time comes, captain; good-night, sir," and Howard De Vigne followed Nick out of the cabin; but, before they had gone ten steps, he grasped the wrecker's arm, and said in a low, earnest tone:

"Nick, to-night we must act, for there is no time to lose."

"No, no, now don't be hasty, Master Howard."

"I know what I am about, Nick; come, listen at the door to what I have to say to Captain Valdós, and then you will hear my plan."

"No, no—"

"Not a word, Nick, I am determined," and Howard De Vigne walked back and boldly entered the cabin of the wrecker captain, while Nick Nabob, in amazement, played eavesdropper outside.

CHAPTER XXX.

DON DIABLO'S CAPTIVE.

"WELL, señora, you are a widow."

Consuelo raised her head from her hands, where for one hour it had rested, while, like a statue she sat in the deepest grief.

Before her, in the cabin companionway, stood the tall form of Don Diablo, and upon her his dark, strangely luminous eyes were turned.

"Yes, I am a widow, and you again are a murderer," she said, calmly.

"That rests lightly upon my conscience, fair lady; it is the first human life one takes that drives the dagger of remorse to his heart, and sets his brain on fire, as he tosses on a sleepless couch during the long hours of the night, his victim ever before him; but the second death-

blow dulls the senses, and as the list increases, one becomes as accustomed to taking life as does the surgeon to performing an operation, and is as callous to the act as is the sawbones to the pain of his patient; why then should I feel the death of the man I hated, my rival on sea as well as on land?"

Don Diablo spoke in a manner that suited well his heartless words, and seating himself opposite to Consuelo, looked straight into her grief-stamped face.

But she made no reply to his words, and he went on:

"I suppose you would like to return to your father?"

"Oh, can it be possible that there is not atom of humanity in your heart?" she cried, clasping her hands imploringly.

"I cannot tell you, as I have not taken soundings or observations lately regarding what virtues I possess; but I am willing to sell you your liberty," he coldly replied.

"Name your price, sir pirate," she said, quickly.

"You had drafts on the lugger with you, payable personally to you, as I know, they being in my possession."

"Yes, my father gave them to me, excepting one which was my poor husband's."

"They call for, altogether, I believe, about one hundred thousand pesos."

"Yes, seventy-five thousand are mine, and the balance belonged to poor Jack."

"All are made out payable to yourself only in person."

"True, my husband wished them so."

"My men are poor, for I have no money of any amount to pay them with, and I will give you your pardon for those drafts."

"Gladly."

"But you will have to draw for me the money."

"Cannot I indorse for you?"

"No, for they read, 'Pay only in person, fully identified, to Señora Consuelo Waldron, née Douro, of Vera Cruz.'"

"Return with me to Vera Cruz, and my father will give you the amount of the drafts in cash."

"No, I prefer to go to New Orleans, and have you draw the money, and then I will deliver you in safety to your father's arms."

"What guarantee have I that you will?" she asked, with biting sarcasm.

"My word."

"If you promised to kill any one, I would myself indorse you, for you would keep your word; but in anything else I have no confidence in you."

"You need have no fear; *El Pirata* is dead, and for your ransom I will get a fortune to divide among my crew; this is revenge enough for me."

"So be it; I will draw the money for you."

"Can you be identified in New Orleans?"

"Yes, I have an uncle there."

"Remember, we go to the bank together; you can even pass me off as Captain Waldron, and upon receiving the gold I will sail at once for Vera Cruz, and deliver you up to your father."

"I am compelled to trust you."

"You may; where does your uncle live, and what is his name?"

"Enoch Douro is his name, and his house is on Carondelet street."

"Then, until we reach New Orleans, farewell, for I relinquish the cabin to you, and my servant shall attend you," and with the courtly grace he well knew how to assume, Don Diablo bowed himself out of Consuelo's presence, and took up his quarters among the officers.

A rapid run and the Crescent City was reached, and the anchor of the schooner, which floated the Mexican flag at her peak, was let fall in the waters of the Mississippi.

An hour passed and Don Diablo presented himself once more before the poor young bride, on whose face rested an expression of anguish that would have touched a heart of stone.

"Señora, I am ready to accompany you to the bank," he said, pleasantly.

"And I may see my uncle first?" she asked, eagerly.

"Señora, I am not to be caught in any trap, as you intended I should be, so I have sent for my business agent to identify you, and he will accompany us to the bank, while, to prevent a scene, such as your calling out that I am Don Diablo, allow me to tell you that I have sent for your uncle's family, and when we leave the schooner they will arrive on board, and Señor Ramirez, my lieutenant, has my orders, if harm befalls me, to put them to death."

"If we return without a scene, then, after a pleasant cruise down the river, I will put them on some up-coming craft to bring them back home."

Poor Consuelo sunk back in her chair, for she had laid plan after plan to entrap the daring pirate chief, and saw that she was outwitted; but she said, frankly:

"I admit that I intended to capture you by some strategy, Don Diablo."

The chief smiled pleasantly and replied:

"Dear señora, you should learn to fight the

devil with fire; but come, our carriage and my agent awaits."

She threw on her mantilla and vail without a word and followed him to the deck, where she was introduced to a man of the same race as her father, as she saw at a glance.

"Monsieur Cohen, this is the Señora Waldron, whom I wish to have you present at the bank, and," added Don Diablo, significantly, "if questions are asked, I am Captain Jack Waldron, her husband."

"I understand, monsieur," replied the Jew, Cohen, speaking in French, the language in which Don Diablo had addressed him, and he continued, with a smirk and a bow:

"Madam, I am proud to meet you."

Consuelo did not even notice his salutation, yet heard his words, and going ashore the three got into a carriage and drove rapidly up into the city, just as another vehicle dashed down to the shore and drew up opposite to the schooner.

"There is your uncle Enoch, señora, and his family, going aboard to pay you a visit; but good Ramilez will receive them."

Consuelo groaned in agony of spirit; but the carriage now drew up at the bank, and the three alighted and entered, while Don Diablo said, in a stern whisper:

"Remember! you seal their doom if harm befalls me, or there is a scene."

She made no reply, and Don Diablo presented Jacobi Douro's drafts, while the Jew introduced Consuelo as the Señora Waldron.

"I suppose the lady's husband has accompanied her, as said in the letter?" and the cashier held up the letter which Don Diablo had handed him.

"Oh, yes, he is here; this is Captain Waldron," replied Cohen, with ready lie, and being a large depositor in the bank his word was not for a moment doubted; and the cashier again asked:

"You will indorse the notes, sir, for your wife?"

"With pleasure, sir," and Don Diablo smiled sweetly, while poor Consuelo would have fallen but for the warning look she received, and, taking the pen, the pirate wrote in a bold hand the name of the man he had forced to walk the plank a few days before.

Then the money was paid, and the three turned away and entering the carriage once more Consuelo sunk back in a faint, and reaching the shore had to be borne on board the schooner.

When she recovered consciousness the vessel was in motion, and she glanced wildly around her, to see Don Diablo watching her from the companionway.

"Oh, tell me what has happened?" she cried, pleadingly.

"Nothing more than that you behaved nobly at the bank, I got the money, you fainted, the crew are happy, and the Sea Gipsy is several miles below the city, on her way to Vera Cruz."

"And my uncle and his family?" she asked, almost hysterically.

"Oh, that was a little ruse of mine, for I did not send for them, only told you the story, and had a carriage ready to carry out the plot."

"Rest contented now, for soon you will be with your father."

"The God of Israel grant it be soon, or I shall go mad," and burying her face in her hands Consuelo wept bitter, scalding tears of anguish.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE DEVIL CALLS ON THE JEW.

A TALL man, with a cloak folded carelessly around him, a long beard encircling the lower part of his face, a sombrero drawn down over his eyes, and the air of a foreigner, strode into the shop of Jacobi Douro, some three weeks after the departure of his daughter, as the bride of El Pirata, and asked in a deep, stern voice to see the Jew.

"He is engaged," curtly responded the same youth who had been, on a former occasion, educating the parrot, reared in a pious Catholic family, to swear in Hebrew.

"I care not, I would see him, boy."

"Who shall I say?"

"Tell him the Devil," was the savage rejoinder, and the Israelite youth quickly departed on his errand, evidently not liking to be in such close proximity to one who hailed from so warm a climate.

But Jacobi seemed not at all adverse to a visit from his Satanic Majesty, for the youth had orders to "Show the Devil up."

This he did, keeping at a respectful distance, and the visitor found the Jew in the same luxuriously-furnished room where he had received Howard De Vigne.

"Ah, glad to see you; but you see I am not alone, for the holy Padre Pinto is with me, sipping a glass of wine; come, sit down, for it will be a precious trio, the Devil, a Padre and a Jew."

"You are facetious, Jew," said the visitor, sternly.

"Not at all; Padre Pinto, this is my friend—eh—captain—well, *The Devil*, as he sent up his name; we'll toast him in a glass of wine."

The padre bowed pleasantly, and the visitor stiffly, while the latter said:

"If the padre will take this small contribu-

tion for his parish, and call at another time to finish his glass of wine with you, he will confer a favor, as my business is pressing, and my time short."

As he spoke he threw a purse filled with gold upon the table.

"The devil giving alms to the church!" cried Jacobi, evidently relishing the scene; but the padre eagerly took the purse and the hint, and arose to go, pouring profuse thanks upon the generosity of the stranger and promising to pray his soul out of Purgatory when he died.

"You are kind, padre, but you would be praying him out of his own domain; but good-day, and come to-morrow to drink a bottle of Spanish wine with me," remarked Jacobi, as he bowed the holy father out of the room.

"Well, Don Diablo, I am glad to see you; what brings you here, after your last daring escapade with the schooner of El Pirata?" and Jacobi seated himself opposite to his guest, who now threw aside his cloak, removed his beard and sombrero, and turned his sinister gaze full upon the other, as he replied:

"A small bit of business; a little matter of ducats; in fact to get a few pounds of your flesh, that is your gold, in return for the return of the flesh of your flesh."

"You are inclined to be facetious too, pirate; explain, please."

"I need money."

"Doubtless; who does not?"

"I must have it."

"Where are your collaterals?"

"Oh, I'll produce the collaterals in good time; but I want a large sum."

"Why don't you capture it?"

"I haven't gotten down to red work yet since I have had the beautiful schooner your son-in-law built for me."

"My son-in-law?" asked Jacobi, in surprise, for he deemed the marriage of Consuelo to El Pirata a secret.

"Yes, El Pirata, Castilla the Corsair, or Captain Jack Waldron, if so it pleases your ear better."

"Well, granted he be, what then?"

"You love your daughter, I suppose?"

"This is impertinence, señor," said Jacobi, in a dignified tone.

"Answer me."

"More than all else in the world."

"Except your gold."

"No; with us we hold blood dearer than gold and jewels."

"I rejoice to hear it, for I demand a large ransom for the lovely Consuelo."

"Ransom! God of Israel! man, what do you mean?"

"Simply that my schooner, flying the American flag, dropped anchor in the harbor an hour ago, and on board of her is your daughter."

"Consuelo in your power? Holy Abraham! what does this mystery mean?" and the Jew confronted the pirate with flaming eyes and trembling form.

"Ah, do not fear, Jew, for she is safe; my fortune, her misfortune, threw her into my power, and I have treated her with the greatest respect in her sorrow."

"Her sorrow? You speak only of my child, my Consuelo; what of her husband?"

"He was lost in the sea, she was saved; but I demand ransom of you, Jacobi, for I need money, as my treasure, you know, went down in my vessel, that was sunk some time ago, you remember."

"What do you want?"

"One hundred thousand pesos."

"One hundred thousand devils!" ejaculated the Jew, savagely.

"Oh no; your friend, the padre, will tell you that one devil is enough; but I need the sum named, Jew."

"Well, if I give you the loan—"

"Loan?"

"Yes, if I give you the loan, what collateral have you?"

"Your daughter?"

Jacobi Douro swore a round oath that would have raised Padre Pinto's hair; but Don Diablo was firm, and he counted out the amount named, and then escorted the pirate to the beach, where his boat awaited him.

Calling to a shore boat to follow he rowed out to the schooner, which lay at anchor, with her sails spread, and a word to Señor Ramilez brought the impatient Consuelo to the deck, and a moment after she was weeping in her father's arms.

"Up with that anchor, Ramilez! Adios, señora! adios, Señor Douro, I hope we may meet again," and springing on his deck, Don Diablo gave orders to have the boat swung at the davits, and the next moment the fleet schooner was flying seaward, saluting the Castle San Juan d'Uloa as she passed, and leaving Jacobi Douro mad with rage at the clever manner in which the daring pirate chief had deceived, outwitted, and robbed him, for the story of her wrongs he quickly heard from poor Consuelo.

But, guilty himself, he dared not row to the guard-boats and tell them that the fast-receding vessel was not an American cruiser, but the schooner of the noted Don Diablo.

CHAPTER XXXII.

HOWARD DE VIGNE PLAYS A BOLD GAME.

WHEN Howard De Vigne entered the cabin of Valdós, the young wrecker captain, he found that he was pacing to and fro in thoughtful mood, and looked up suspiciously at the intruder, while he quickly resumed his seat at the table, at the same time keeping his hands beneath it.

The American saw at a glance the Cuban was suspicious of him, and knew that he was fingering weapons, conveniently placed at hand, and concealed by the table; but he gave no sign of suspecting that Valdós doubted him, and said:

"Señor, now that I have left good Nick Nabob, I will confess to you that there has been a deception practiced; but then I knew not just how far to trust my old shipmate."

"I do not understand you," said the Cuban, eying him closely.

"I will explain: Nick found me in Vera Cruz, but I knew not that he was one of the Wrecker League, but finding it out came with him, for I have a communication for you."

"For me?"

"Yes, señor, and some money."

"A communication for me and some money; now tell me from whence it comes?" said the Cuban, in surprise.

Howard De Vigne paused until the reverberations of the signal gun, which was still firing, died away, and then answered:

"From Don Diablo, the chief."

"Ah! sent he no letter to me?"

"No, señor, I am the bearer of this ring, and it entitles me to belief," and Howard drew the large ruby, with its gold eagle's claws clasping it, from his pocket, and placing it on the little finger of his left hand held it forth to the view of the wrecker captain.

"You are certainly entitled to belief, señor; sit down, pray," said the Cuban, with marked politeness in his tones.

Howard seated himself in the chair on the opposite side of the table, and in calm tones, and with his eyes fixed upon the face of Valdós, said:

"Captain, Don Diablo heard of the wreck of the Blue Wave, on this island, and of the prisoners you still hold, and which consist of Colonel Tudor, his wife, his daughter Nellie, Miss Lucille Marsden, and several seamen."

"He has been well informed; well, what then?" was the curt response.

"Knowing Colonel Tudor and Miss Marsden to be wealthy, he sought their friends, and received from them a princely ransom, so secured as to be paid to him when the captives are landed at a point to which I am ordered to take them, and through me he sends you your share of fifty thousand dollars, and I have it here for you."

Howard De Vigne spoke without the slightest hesitation, carrying out the bold plan he had suddenly formed with a courage that was innate in his nature; but he saw by the sinister smile on Valdós's face that he intended to play tricky with him, and the words of the wrecker convinced him of it, for he said quietly:

"Señor, it is a handsome sum, and of course I will accept it; but there is one of the prisoners that has consented to become my wife, and she will remain here."

"May I ask which one that is?"

"Miss Lucille Marsden; I met her in Havana, when she visited there, and loved her then, and she returned that love, for she knew me not as the captain of the Wreckers' League; but accident throwing her in my way, she has forgiven me my sins, as a loving woman should, and is to become my wife."

"The others, however, I will have on board the shallop to-morrow by noon, and you can have Nick Nabob land you at any place you desire within reason."

"Come to my cabin then in the morning, and I will have letters for you to carry back to the chief, and you can pay me the money and receive my receipt."

"But must I pay you the fifty thousand when Miss Marsden remains?"

"The arrangement was ten thousand each, for Miss Marsden and the Tudors, and the balance for the seamen."

"It matters not, for it will be her dowry; come here at noon and we will arrange it, and when you reach the shallop the captives will be there; good-night, señor."

Howard De Vigne nodded, and taking the hint departed, walking straight away from the door to a huge rock a hundred feet distant.

But Nick Nabob was not there, and he looked anxiously around for him, to descry him coming toward him at a rapid run.

"Well, Nick?" he asked, quietly.

"By Neptune! but you worked it well, Master Howard, and you are right, that what we does we must do ter-night, as when yer left ther cabin Valdós called out to somebody in the adjoining room, and a young feller entered, and says to him, says he:

"Guatil, you just go after that feller, find where he bunks ter-night, and then see Cosala and let him lie in wait at the Rocks for him, and

then tell this fine messenger of Don Diablo to come to me; does yer understand?"

"The boy nodded pleasant like, and Valdós continued:

"Tell Cosala to do his work well and throw his body over the cliff into the sea, and come here for his thousand pesos—but there comes the lad, Master Howard, and—"

"Forewarned is forearmed, good Nick Nabob," responded Howard De Vigne, and they both shrunk back into the shadow of the rock, while coming toward them at a rapid walk was the lad whom Valdós had sent on his mission of crime.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN ALLY.

HARDLY had Nick Nabob and Howard De Vigne sprung back into the rock's shadow, when the lad came along at a swift walk, to suddenly find himself in the grasp of two men, and a knife held before his face.

"One cry, one effort to escape, and you die," said Howard De Vigne, in a low, stern tone.

The youth took his capture without any sign of uneasiness, and glanced into the face of one, and then the other of his captors, at the same time saying:

"I have no desire to cry out or escape; I was seeking you, Nabob, to tell you that I was sent on a message that would end the life of your friend here."

"Halt! say you so, youngster? Who sends you, and to whom do you go?" asked Nick, suspiciously.

"Valdós sends me, and I seek Cosala."

"That is true, Nick, I can vouch for," said Howard De Vigne.

"For what purpose were you going?" asked Nick.

"To tell Cosala to put an end to this man's life," and he continued, as he turned to Howard:

"Señor, I know who and what you are; we have met before, but when and where it matters not; but I am your friend, and I advise you to leave this island at once, as Valdós, that he may keep Señorita Marsden here, will have you killed, and say you never arrived on the island, while he will get a ransom from Colonel Tudor, and send him away in the morning with Nick."

"Well, you has got him down fine, youngster; but who are you that seems ther foe of Valdós, when we all thought you his friend?"

"I am, as you know me to be, Nick Nabob, a poor lad whom the wreckers picked up adrift in an open boat, my vessel having gone down; but I serve not Valdós from love, but for another motive I care not to make known," replied the youth, and Howard De Vigne said frankly:

"I will trust you, my lad, and more, I will take your advice."

"Hark! how pitifully those guns appeal for aid, but they cry in vain, for they will drift on the reef; it is fearful, this luring brave ships to ruin and their crews to death."

"Fearful indeed is it, Guatíl, and I, for one, am going to quit it; but now what's ter be done?" remarked Nick.

"Well, I would advise that you go at once to the basin and get the shallop ready to sail, while Lieutenant De Vigne—"

"Halt! you do know me," exclaimed the American, in surprise.

"I said so, señor," was the quiet response, and then the lad went on:

"As I said, it would be best for Lieutenant De Vigne to go at once to the guard, over the captain's quarters, and surprise and bind him, or, if necessary, kill him; I will follow behind, and then show him where Colonel Tudor and the ladies are, and the hut of the seamen, too, and will lead them by the cliff path to the beach, and round that way to the basin, though they will have to put up with wet feet."

"The very idee, lad, and I'll scuttle ther lugger so she can't foller, if we is discovered, and meet you at ther basin; but I'll look up Antonio first, Master Howard."

"Do so, for he is a true fellow; but, my lad, won't you get into trouble with Valdós?"

"No, señor, for I will return as soon as you reach the basin, and get Cosala and go with him to the captain, and tell him I cannot find you."

"But will you not go with us?"

"No, for I have a certain duty to perform ere I go," said the youth, in a strangely earnest tone.

"Then let us lose no time, for the night is growing old," responded Howard De Vigne.

"Yes, we must do what we have to do promptly, señor," and the youth turned away, and, after a hasty word to Nick Nabob, Howard followed him.

At a rapid pace the lad led the way further up the glen, until they came in view of the four cabins occupied by the captives, and from which shone lights, showing that the occupants had not retired.

"Señor, do you see that man there by the tree?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is the guard, and if you walk

straight up to him he will halt you and ask your business.

"Answer him that Captain Valdós has sent you to request Colonel Tudor to come to his quarters, and, as he turns to approach the cabin, strike him down, and mind you, hit him a blow that will stun him; then you can gag and bind him, with your scarf and belt."

The lad spoke with the utmost coolness, as though knowing he addressed one fully capable of mastering the guard without trouble, and, without a word Howard De Vigne advanced, and then came the challenge in Spanish:

"Halt! who are you, and what do you want?"

"I come from Captain Valdós, with the request that Colonel Tudor visit him immediately at his quarters."

"Go to his cabin and tell him," was the short reply, and, as Howard approached, not knowing which was the colonel's cabin, the guard asked:

"Is that you, Cosala?"

"Yes," answered the American, gruffly.

"If the captain sends you on an errand, Cosala, you generally leave red tracks behind you," was the significant remark of the guard, ending with a light laugh.

"It may be so in this case," answered Howard, and, with a sudden spring, he was upon the guard, and his fist striking full in his face sent him reeling to the ground.

Before a cry could escape the lips of the frightened man, another blow stunned him, and with an alacrity and skill that was astonishing, Howard had him gagged and bound securely by the time Guatíl, the lad, came up.

"That was well done, señor; had I known it was Tampico on guard I would have warned you that he was a dangerous and powerful man; do you see yonder tree?" and Guatíl pointed to a solitary tree half a hundred yards distant.

"Yes."

"Well, I will await you there, and you have no time to lose; that is Colonel Tudor's cabin."

As the youth darted away, Howard stepped forward and knocked at the door of the end cabin, and a voice within bade him enter, which he quickly did.

Around a table sat four persons, evidently discussing some important subject, as they had hushed suddenly at his knock, and all looked rather anxiously toward him as he entered and closed the door behind him.

A fine-looking man of fifty, with a military air, was the first the eye of Howard De Vigne fell upon, while in front of him was a matron, with a sad, sweet face that was very attractive.

Two maidens, both of them beautiful in spite of the anxious expression they wore, sat *vis-à-vis*, and one of them the reader will recognize as Lucille Marsden; the other was Nellie Tudor.

"Well, sir?" and Colonel Tudor arose to his feet, at the supposed intrusion of one of the wreckers.

"I have not the honor of your personal acquaintance, Colonel Tudor, but Miss Marsden may remember me," and, while speaking, Howard advanced into the room.

With a startled cry Lucille Marsden was upon her feet, and there burst from her lips the name ever in her thoughts:

"Howard!"

"Yes, Lucille, I am here to save you; now I cannot say more, for we must start at once, would we succeed."

With a glad cry, and forgetting the presence of others, Lucille threw herself into the arms of her lover, and burst into tears; but his voice of warning recalled her to herself, for he said quickly:

"Come, Lucille, you need all your nerve, would you leave this island to-night, and thus avoid the fate intended for you."

Instantly she was herself again, and said earnestly:

"Forgive me, Howard, but your sudden presence, when I deemed you far away, unnerved me: Colonel Tudor, this is Lieutenant Howard De Vigne, of whom you have heard me often speak."

"Lieutenant De Vigne, I rejoice to meet you; but, if your words are true, this is no time for introductions or delay; you say that there is a chance to leave this island to-night?"

"Yes, sir, at once; Valdós is playing you false, and I am here to aid you, and almost alone I may say; your guard is bound and gagged, and I will ask you to arouse the others who are captives with you, while I aid the ladies to get ready."

Colonel Tudor instantly left the cabin, with a word of warning to hasten to his wife, and within ten minutes' time from Howard De Vigne's entrance the lights were out in both cabins, and the little party of half a score started on their way to the basin, the guard having been more securely gagged and bound by two of the seamen.

At the solitary tree they were met by Guatíl, who hurried them down the steep cliff path at a really dangerous pace, and from thence to the beach, upon which every wave was breaking.

The storm was still raging, the imploring minute-guns still pealed, and it was a fearful

night; but joining hands in a long line, with Guatíl in advance, they struggled along over the wave-washed beach, and at last rounded the ragged point of rocks that formed the shelter of the little basin, where the shallop, with her sails set, close-reefed, was discovered lying at anchor not far away.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE MYSTERIOUS FACE.

As the fugitives reached the basin, Guatíl gave a shrill whistle, which was immediately answered from the shallop with:

"Ay, ay; the boats lie yonder; come on board."

A few paces on were several skiffs, drawn up upon the beach, and their oars lay near them, and quickly the half-dozen seamen of the party launched two of them, and held them ready for the colonel and the ladies to embark, which they quickly did.

"Now, lads, spring in yourselves; but where is Guatíl?" said Howard, as he prepared to get into the boat.

All looked around, but the youth had mysteriously disappeared.

"Never mind him, for I know he had duty to call him elsewhere; give way, lads," said Howard, and two minutes after the boats were alongside the shallop.

"Well, Nick, all goes well so far; but are you alone?" and Howard sprung on deck and aided the ladies up.

"No, Master Howard, Antonio's forward at the anchor; set ther boats adrift, lads; now, Tony, up with that anchor, and we'll throw this durned island ten leagues astern by daybreak; there, she moves, and we'll catch all the wind we want when we shoot out beyond that point o' rocks," and Nick Nabob sprung to the helm as the little shallop began to shoot through the water, careening gracefully to the breeze.

"Nick, I'll aid you with the helm—Halt! there goes that signal-gun again; what is it, Nick?" asked Howard, as once more the deep reverberations of the minute gun rolled along the rocky shores.

"Some dismantled vessel, I guesses, that has dropped anchor, and is dragging toward the reef, and hopes some boat will come off to their aid—there, now we get ther gale, an' she's a-blowing great guns; it's going ter be uncommon rough for ther ladies," and, as Nick spoke, the shallop dashed out from the shelter of the land, and headed for the chaotic mass of waters that showed them where the channel ran through the reef.

But the stanch little craft, though her decks were flooded, bounded on like a thing of life, shaking the torrents of water off, and rising gallantly from the depths that threatened to engulf her.

At length the narrow channel was reached, and with a staggering, sinking, bounding all together, the shallop forged her way through, and was in the wide passage between the sand-hills and small islands, and heading straight for open water, for Nick Nabob had glanced upward as he shaped his course, and brought the False Beacon directly astern.

"Great God! behold that ship," burst from the lips of Colonel Tudor, as there came a bright flash ahead.

All saw it—a large vessel, dismantled, a wreck, and dragging her anchors, as the waves drove her nearer and nearer the reef that had wrecked so many noble ships in the past.

"It's a close shave, Master Howard, but we has ter go ter leeward of her," said Nick Nabob.

"Ay, ay, we can hold her steady; but see that crowd on her decks, and hear that cry," and, as Howard De Vigne spoke, there rung out a wild shout, not of fear, but of joy.

"They believes we is coming to their aid; poor things, nothing can save 'em now," said Nick, sadly.

"Cannot we luff up, and—"

"Master Howard, don't let your heart run foul o' yer brains; if we was ter make ther slightest mistake here, the shallop would go down; why, I couldn't stop for you now."

"They have lanterns and are hailing us; there are women on board—Oh, God!"

The cry came from Colonel Tudor, and it was echoed by all on board the shallop, for a huge wave had suddenly boarded the wreck, and swept a score of human beings off into the waters.

"Heavens! see that face! there, the one the lantern shines on so brightly—it is she!"

"Who, Master Howard?" cried Nick, as Howard De Vigne suddenly left the wheel and sprung to one side of the shallop, gazing fixedly at a small group upon the wreck, and whose faces were lit up by the lanterns held by several men.

But, as he spoke, another huge wave was hurled upon the doomed vessel, and wild shrieks rent the air, as half the little group were carried off upon its seething bosom, and among them the one whose presence there had so excited Howard De Vigne.

The wreck was now not two lengths of the shallop away, and the wave that had broken over it came rolling down upon the shallop with fearful force; but upon its white crest Howard

De Vigne saw one whom he determined to make a desperate effort to save from death, and hastily seizing a rope he gave one end a quick turn around a cleat and tying the other around his waist sprang into the sea, unrestrained by the cries of those who saw his intention and would have stopped him if in their power.

And Lucille Marsden, looking with staring eyes and trembling heart, saw the bold swimmer seize in his arms a human form, and then heard his words:

"I have her safe; haul in!"

The men sprang to the rope to obey, but the resistless wave rushed past with such force that when the check came the hemp parted, and Howard De Vigne, clasping a woman in his arms, was borne from sight into the caldron of waters.

A wailing shriek from Lucille Marsden, a muttered curse from Nick Nabob, and the shallop flew on past the wreck, for to hesitate then, in that caldron of mad waters, the daring pilot knew was certain death to all on the little craft.

"There is no hope for the brave man," whispered Colonel Tudor to Nick Nabob, as he glanced at Lucille, moaning bitterly, as she lay in the arms of his wife.

"None; that boy is dead by this time, and he lost his life for a woman; but no truer lad ever died than he was," and the noble-hearted wrecker's voice trembled as he spoke, while huge tears rolled from his eyes and mingled with the salt sea-spray.

But there was no tremor in the iron hand that grasped the tiller, and held the shallop straight on her course through the wild waters, while his ears were unmindful of the fearful crash as the ship struck and the piteous shrieks, so soon smothered, for his thoughts were down in the dark waves with the man who had years ago risked his life for him, and whom he had loved as few men love each other.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE TWO FLAGS.

"FATHER, you are a very rich man, are you not?"

"I shall not leave you poor, Consuelo."

"I am not asking regarding your wealth, señor, from any such selfish motive; you are worth over a million, I believe?"

"Yes, with my securities in Vera Cruz, my property in New York and my accounts with the banks in Havana and New Orleans I am worth over a million, my child."

"Of course you deduct the sum you paid for Jack's escape, and the amounts that Don Diablo so cleverly defrauded us out of?"

"Yes, curse him, I would give a hundred thousand dollars to revenge myself on him for that; but why do you ask these questions, Consuelo?"

"You have named the reason—revenge on Don Diablo."

The two, father and daughter, sat together in their handsome home, and it was some days after the sailing of the shallop bearing Howard De Vigne to the Wreckers' Island.

On every feature of Consuelo's beautiful face was the stamp of grief, for she had mourned deeply the loss of her husband; but, the more she brooded over her sorrows the more a firm resolve seized upon her to be revenged upon the man who had so cruelly ordered El Pirata to death, and at last she had resolved upon a plan to bring Don Diablo to punishment.

What that plan was the further conversation of Jacobi Douro and Consuelo will develop.

"Ah, Consuelo, I would freely spend my money in such a cause," sighed the Jew.

"Then allow me to suggest a plan; you heard of Major Fernando Navaro's luck at cards, I suppose?"

"Yes, he won a large sum from an American, I believe."

"And more; the American, it seems, was a naval officer of wealth, who received a year's leave of absence, and started on a cruise of pleasure in an armed yacht; visiting Vera Cruz he fell in with Navaro, who invited him up to the Army Club, and as the stranger was a great card-player, he lost heavily; in fact, he lost his all, I have heard, to the different Mexican officers, and the major won a round sum and his yacht, which was staked against a certain amount."

"Well, Consuelo?"

"You know Navaro's failing, and that though the world believes him rich, he is up to-day and down to-morrow in money matters, and he will readily sell the yacht to you."

"But, my child, I do not want the vessel."

"But I do, father."

"And for what, Consuelo? I should think you had had enough of the sea."

"Not so; I want that yacht to put under a man who will hunt down Don Diablo."

"And who is that man?"

"Howard De Vigne."

"But I told you that he had gone away in the wreckers' shallop."

"And you have means of communication with the wreckers, and can, in some way, send him word to return."

"Well, my child, I am willing to do what I can in the matter."

"Then offer the major a round sum for his yacht, and then give me a certain sum to fit her up for a long cruise; but first send word to the Wreckers' Island to have De Vigne return; he went in disguise, you said?"

"He shaved off his mustache and cut his hair short, while he dressed as a common sailor; it disguised him from what he was, but the man was there, all the same."

"He is indeed a man, and the very one to put on the track of Don Diablo."

"But, Consuelo, what commission will he sail under?"

"None, simply as a pirate-hunter, and I will make him a flag—a blue field, a red sea-serpent and a white eagle, with outstretched wings strangling the reptile."

"A good device, if you mean the serpent for Don Diablo, the eagle for our American friend, and the blue field for the sea; but I would suggest one more to the point, Consuelo."

"Name it, father."

"A red field, a black gallows and a hanging noose awaiting a neck to strangle."

"He shall have both; yours for the fore, mine for the peak, and if he captures and hangs Don Diablo, neither the United States, Spain or Mexico will ask him for his commission; when will you attend to this, father?"

"I will write at once to my Havana agent to communicate with the wreckers, and look up Pedro Sanchez, which is the name De Vigne is known by, I believe?"

"And Navaro?"

"I will send Emanuel for him immediately."

"My dear good father," and kissing him affectionately, Consuelo left the room, while Jacobi wrote two notes, and summoned his sharp boy, Emanuel.

"Catch the Havana packet with this letter; she sails within half an hour; then bear this one to Major Fernando Navaro," he said to the youth, who darted rapidly away, glad to escape from the dingy shop, and leave his master in attendance, for, though Jacobi made a living out of his business, in loaning to the needy of Vera Cruz, he made vast sums outside by his skill in financial transactions, his store being but a blind to hide his underhand deeds.

Emanuel was gone the usual length of time it takes a boy to go an errand, no matter what the distance to travel be, or the delay, and Jacobi Douro was waxing wroth when the youth put in an appearance, with a ready lie on his lips as to the cause of his detention.

A ready, and experienced liar himself, Jacobi knew that Emanuel was dodging the truth, and took the story with what allowance he wished, and asked:

"What said Major Navaro?"

"That he would come and see you at once; but that he wondered what Old Shylock wanted with him."

"Ah! he called me Old Shylock, did he? well, well, that remark shall be expensive to him—there he comes now; send him up to my room, Emanuel," and Jacobi hastily retreated to his sumptuous apartment, and settled himself comfortably at his desk, when the Mexican officer entered.

"Well, Jacobi, you wanted to see me, I believe?" and Major Navaro threw himself into an easy-chair, and taking up the decanter of brandy near his elbow poured out a glass.

"Yes, señor; you are in fortune, I hear?"

"True, I have won some little money; you gave me luck when you paid me the price of El Pirata's freedom."

"It's more than I gave those three soldiers who were shot," dryly remarked the Jew.

But the Mexican did not change color; only answered indifferently:

"Oh, they were but common soldiers, and what was life to them?"

"True, only the rich deserve to live, señor; but tell me, please, would you like to sell the yacht you won?"

"No, Jacobi, I am not in want now."

"Yet I hold mortgages on your estates, señor, that you would perhaps like to pay off."

"It would be the last thing you would wish me to do, Jew, for if I do not pay the eighty thousand I owe you, you well know in the market, what you hold mortgages on, would bring you three times that sum."

"There's nothing so valuable in a man's eyes, señor, as his own property; it is like a boatman who has a fast craft; she can beat anything afloat, and sails like the wind, until put in a race, and then comes out at the end furthest from the winning stake."

"Still I know what my property is worth; why, if I cared to have it known that I got dead broke occasionally, I could go to a purveyor of property here, and get a loan of nearly twice the sum you advanced; is this what you wanted with me, Jew?"

"No, I wish to buy your yacht."

"What! are you going to pirating on the high seas, Jacobi Douro?" asked the major, in a tone of mock horror.

"I have not decided whether I shall or not; perhaps that is why you do not care to sell, ex-

pecting that you may have to fly for your life some day, and raise the black flag, sneered the Jew, and it caused the major to scowl fiercely, and say:

"If I do, you will have robbed me by usury and caused me to do some act I will be driven to; but is this all you want of me, Jew?"

"I will pay you well for the yacht."

"If luck changes, I may give you a call; but, as I know you want the craft, rest assured you shall pay for it every dollar it cost, with interest on the amount since the day it was built."

"I gamble to-night at the Monté Club, Jew, and you know what a fickle lover Fortune is, so do not be surprised if I sell you the yacht, though I hope not to do so; but, by the way, if you care to stake a sum against it, and come to the club to-night, I will play you for it."

"I never gamble, Major Navaro."

"Ha! ha! ha! why, you are a born gambler, for your race are speculators from the cradle up."

"Never gamble! that is good; what do you call your loaning money on other people's wants? Ah! that is not gambling, for you are sure to win; good-day, Jacobi," and Major Navaro left the room; but hardly had he done so, when Consuelo glided in.

"Well, my child, you heard what he said?"

"Yes, but I do not despair, for Fortune is fickle, as he says; but there is one it will cling to, and I will bide my time," and, though Jacobi Douro asked his daughter for an explanation of her words, she made no reply.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE MEETING IN THE WATERS.

When Howard De Vigne sprang to the aid of a woman, whose face he had recognized by the light of the lanterns on the wreck, he had hoped to save her by his bold act; but he had not thought that the rope might break, and thus carry him to death.

When, therefore, it parted, his first thought was that he was doomed to die with the one whom he had clasped in his arms, and he waved a farewell to those on the shallop, for he knew no effort could be made to save him, and gave himself up for a moment as lost.

But a voice in his ear said:

"Oh, sir, you have but thrown your life away to save mine, for now we both must die."

There was a strange calmness in the woman's words and manner, and it aroused the young sailor to action, and he answered cheerily:

"We are not dead yet; cling to me, and we may yet battle our way through."

It was a hopeless chance for life, as seen among those wild waters; but Howard De Vigne was a noted swimmer, and as strong as a lion, while he had wonderful powers of endurance.

Had he not been through that channel with Nick Nabob, he never could have had the slightest chance; but the False Beacon showed him where he was, and as he rose upon a mighty wave, he beheld the foaming torrent that flowed through the broken reef that encircled the island, and for this he headed.

To his joy, also, he discovered that the one he aided could swim, and he urged her merely to keep herself afloat, and save her powers for the wild waters in the reef channel, when they should reach there.

"There is some one swimming near," she replied, and Howard glanced in the direction in which she pointed, and beheld nearly a dozen dark objects rise on the crest of a wave.

"Ho there! follow me! it is your only chance," he cried, and his voice, heard above the howling wind and wash of waters, reached their ears, for they were but a few fathoms distant, and the bold swimmers struck out for the one who had given them encouragement.

He waited until they came near, and saw that here were several women in the struggling group, supported between the strong arms of gallant men, while there were others swimming alone.

To encourage them, he called out:

"There where the water is wildest, is a break in the reef; once through there, and you are comparatively safe; but to attempt to reach land elsewhere will be your death."

Then he struck out manfully to lead the forlorn hope of swimmers, and they followed, strung out, as their powers of endurance permitted.

When he had gained the current that was bearing him toward the break in the reef, yet quite a distance off, he heard a cry behind him, and down from sight sunk some worn-out swimmer, and, unnerved by this, several more went beneath the waters to find a watery grave.

"Oh, Mark! Mark!" suddenly cried the one whom Howard De Vigne supported, and glancing around quickly, he beheld near him a swimmer, who was struggling hard.

"Release me, sir, for I can aid myself, and save him," cried the woman, and Howard quickly obeyed, seizing the arm of the worn-out swimmer, and saying encouragingly:

"Now rest, sir, awhile, and you will be as good as new for the final struggle."

The man leaned heavily upon him for a moment, while the woman steadied herself near, and gaining confidence, and a short rest, he said:

"I am all right now; but keep near me."

"I shall not desert either you or Miss Fielding, Mr. Manly," was the quiet rejoinder.

"You know us, then?" asked the man, in surprise.

"Come! yonder lies the death-gantlet, and we are sweeping rapidly upon it; give me your hands," and, as he seized them with his firm grasp, he called back to the few swimmers, that yet struggled on:

"Keep up! keep up! for once through yonder reef and you are safe."

Then down into the foaming caldron the fierce torrent swept them, and, like chips in a mill-race, they were whirled and hurled about.

Now down deep under the waves, now thrown almost out of the water, and then driven forward with irresistible force, strangled, blinded, battered, they found themselves at last through the chaotic passage, and only to buffet the quieter waves of the inner bay.

But who?

With his grasp still upon the arms of those he had saved, and whom the rudest waves had not torn from him, Howard De Vigne glanced behind him.

Alas! but one bold swimmer met his gaze, and he was but a few yards distant, battling as bravely as ever, and with undaunted courage.

Seeing that he was not tired out, and feeling the man he upheld growing heavier and heavier, Howard called to him in Spanish:

"Señor, will you aid me here?"

"Willingly; a lady whom I supported in the waters was torn from me in that caldron; but we are all safe now, what there is left of us," was the cheery response, and with a strong stroke the man drew near, and held up one arm of the tired-out swimmer that Howard had so long upheld.

"Now on once more, and we are safe; I can stand a heavier weight, Miss Fielding, if you are tired," said Howard De Vigne.

"I am not yet tired out; aid him, please, for he needs it more than I do," was the unselfish response.

And on the four swimmers went, steadily, but slowly, until at last their feet touched the sandy bottom, and staggering, almost dropping with fatigue, they reached the rocks above, and sunk down utterly exhausted.

And there they remained, the three listening to the story of the one, as he told about the false beacon and the island on which they had sought shelter from death.

At last the shivering group saw the east grow gray, then rosy, and they looked into each other's haggard faces, and two men spoke two names in one breath.

Those names were:

"Jack Waldron!"

"Howard De Vigne."

"You here?"

"And you here?"

And their hands were clasped, while Jack Waldron said:

"I owe you my life, De Vigne, for I was heading for the breakers, when you hailed me and told me to follow you."

"Howard De Vigne."

Taken up with their strange meeting, neither had glanced into the faces of the others; but as his name was pronounced in a low tone, Howard De Vigne turned quickly and found himself confronted by Mark Manly and Magdalene Fielding, and said, with no seeming bitter remembrance of the past:

"We are fellow-sufferers, Mr. Manly."

"Yes; the doctors ordered me South, and my wife accompanied me; but, Lieutenant De Vigne, I owe you my life, as does also Magdalene, and here I beg that you forgive the past, and, if you can, forget it."

"Willingly, Manly; it was recognizing the face of your wife by the lanterns on the wreck that made me try to save her, and the breaking of the rope nearly lost both our lives; but it is better as it is now; but come, we have a fearful ordeal to face, so let us get through with it."

Magdalene turned pale at his words, and seeing it Howard said:

"Your life is safe, Mrs. Manly; only these wreckers will demand a handsome sum as a ransom for yourself and husband; are you known here, Waldron?"

"No, I think not."

"Then you are safe; but last night I did that against Captain Valdós, the Wrecker, that will cost me my life, if—"

"If what, De Vigne?"

"Come, we shall see," and Howard led the way up toward the wreckers' retreat.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

VALDOS MEETS HIS MATCH.

THE scene that presented itself the morning after the storm on Wreckers' Island, was dismal in the extreme.

The clouds had drifted away, the wind had

lulled, and the sea was running down, though the waves still fell upon the rocky shores with a heavy roar.

Upon the reef, called the Rock of Fortune, by the wreckers, the huge hull of the wrecked vessel was visible, shattered, careened to one side, and desolate, for not one of the forty souls that had sailed in the noble vessel several weeks before from New York was visible.

Where she had been hurled by a mighty wave, there she remained, and a group of two-score wreckers were standing upon the cliff, from which had shone the False Beacon, gazing down with gloating eyes upon the sad sight, though to them a sight of joy, for the huge hulk held treasures for them they well knew.

Presently into their midst came three forms, and the wreckers made room for them to pass to the edge of the cliff.

One was Valdós, the wrecker captain, and his brow was dark, his eyes burned, and his lips were set.

Another was Guatíl, the youth, and a kind of valet and aide to Valdós, and his face wore also a look of concern.

The third was the guard who had been placed over the captives, and whom his shipmates called Old Tampico, and his face was savage in its expression, while his eyes were bloodshot, his lips swollen, and his wrists bleeding from the efforts he had made to free them of the thongs with which he had been bound.

Glancing over the sea, and then down at the wreck, Valdós said, sternly:

"The Beacon did its work well last night; but there are traitors in this band that shall rue their work."

"Cosala, I sent! or you ast night and he fixed his eyes upon a Spaniard whose face was a picture of villainy."

"Yes, señor; but I received no message."

"You could not be found."

"I was in the cavern gambling, señor."

"Ah! then I hope you lost for not leaving word where you could be found; have any of you seen Nabob this morning?"

"We knew not he was here, señor," said a sub-officer.

"He was here; the shallop came in last night in the blow."

"It is not in the basin now, señor, for I looked over the cliff, and the lugger was sunk by the storm," said the same speaker.

"You lie, El Cabre! the shallop sailed again within an hour after her running in, and Nick Nabob scuttled the lugger to prevent her pursuing; if you all were as wide awake as Guatíl here, the traitor could not have escaped."

"Nabob a traitor?" asked several voices.

"Yes, either that, or he was overpowered on the shallop and carried off; but certain it is, that a stranger came to the island last night, pretending to be sent from Don Diablo, and under cover of the darkness he struck down Tampico here, bound and gagged him, and rescued Colonel Tudor and the other captives, just as I had arranged an enormous ransom for them."

The men stood aghast with amazement, and Valdós continued:

"Tampico was discovered by Guatíl this morning, as was also the flight of the shallop, and you can see how ill-used your comrade was, for he has been bound and gagged all night."

"Now, you accursed crew, what have you to say, for permitting night to cover up such acts under your very noses?"

Not a word was said by any of the band in reply, for all felt guilty of gross negligence; but after awhile the light-keeper said:

"I saw the shallop come in and go out, captain; but I deemed it not necessary to report it, any more than I did the coming in of a wreck, whose guns I supposed could be heard."

"I do not blame you, Sancho; but, by the saints, I'll keep you all awake at night, in the future, if I have to hang you up by the thumbs at sunset; but you have lost gold by letting the shallop run out, and not a sueldo of what that wreck's cargo brings shall any one of you have."

Dark looks went around the group of men, and several muttered oaths were heard; but unheeding the glances and the murmuring, Valdós said sternly:

"Now, down to the basin, you lazy dogs, and raise that lugger— Ha! who have we here?"

The exclamation of their captain caused all to glance in the direction in which he was looking, and what had startled him was visible to every eye, for four persons were seen coming slowly toward them.

"Some who have managed to escape from the wreck," said El Cabre.

"There is a woman among them, and she appears beautiful," muttered Valdós.

But Guatíl, the lad, turned pale, and mentally said:

"Alas! he is among them, and his doom is sealed; oh, how came he here, when I believed him far away?"

In silence the wreckers stood until the party approached, their clothing torn, their faces haggard, and a general expression of weariness upon all.

"Aha! you are here, señor!" seize that man!"

cried Valdós, furiously, as Howard De Vigne suddenly stepped forward as spokesman.

Instantly several of the wreckers sprang to obey the bidding of their captain; but he warned them back with his upraised hand, and said, in his clear, ringing tones:

"Hold! men of the Gulf League, I command you, forbear!"

They shrunk back before his commanding tones, until Valdós again cried:

"Seize him, I say! he it was who stole from you your captives and the shallop."

Again the wreckers moved to obey, and once more Howard De Vigne spoke:

"Men, I am unarmed, as you see; but I hold power here over him, for I come from your chief, Don Diablo."

"He lies; cut him down," and Valdós drew a knife as though to carry out his word.

"Men of the Gulf League, behold the signet of your chief."

All eyes were turned upon the hand of Howard De Vigne, as he held it up before them, and they beheld the ruby ring and the eagle claws of gold, and again they paused and looked to Valdós.

"I rule here; cut him down, I say, for he has robbed you of your ransom for the captives," shouted the wrecker captain.

"Valdós, you lie in your teeth, for here I have the ransom money for the captives; men, hear me, and judge between us."

"They shall not hear you; seize him, I say!" yelled Valdós, and he sprang toward Howard De Vigne; but El Cabre, Old Tampico, Cosala, and Sancho quickly stepped before him, while the former said, politely:

"Captain, the ring gives the señor the right to speak, and we must hear him."

"Ha! do you dare me, dogs?" and Valdós drew a pistol from his belt.

"We dare say the señor shall be heard, captain; put up your pistol, for all are against you," in the same polite and quiet way.

"He dare not refuse, or else I claim the power to put him under arrest, for the *Pirate*, not the *Wrecker* is the chief of the Gulf League," responded Howard De Vigne, quickly taking advantage of the demonstration in his favor.

With a muttered curse Valdós stepped back, and the American continued:

"Lads, I came to your island in disguise, on your shallop, and I sought Captain Valdós, and told him Don Diablo had sent me for the captives wrecked on the Blue Wave, and given me, for him, the liberal share of the ransom paid him for their release."

"He told me that one, a fair maiden, loved him, and wished to remain with him, but that the others should go."

"I knew that he was playing me false, for ere I entered his cabin I heard him bartering with Colonel Tudor for ransom, and refusing any sum for the release of Miss Marsden."

"And I knew that he intended to keep her here against her will, and receive a ransom from the colonel, who was not to know that his agent had paid it."

"Nay, more, after leaving, I again listened, and heard him tell this youth to seek Cosala and put him on my track to kill me, intending not to let it be known that I was on the island, and thereby be able to tell Don Diablo I had not reached here, and get a double ransom, one of which he would have kept for himself."

"Knowing this, I fought him with his own weapon, *deceit*, and making the guard a prisoner, put the captives on the shallop, and sent them to sea under Nick Nabob, who was forced, as one of the League, to obey the power I hold in this ring."

"If I have spoken truly, this youth will know, as he was in the cabin, and the guard remembers whether it was I that knocked him down and bound him."

"You did it, and it surprised me, for I lead the band in strength," said Old Tampico, frankly.

"And you, Guatíl, what do you say?" and Howard turned to the youth, and gave a slight start, as he looked squarely in the lad's face.

Guatíl saw the look and sudden start, and his face flushed slightly; but he answered:

"I am compelled to admit that the señor speaks the truth."

"Lads, do you hear that? The captain turned traitor to the chief, and would have slain one who wore the secret signet," and El Cabre faced the crowd, while angry denunciations arose on all sides, and one voice shouted:

"He must die!"

"Hold, men! act not hastily, for there is plenty of time."

"Captain Valdós has proven a traitor, and I, wearing this ring, order him under arrest until you have decided what shall be his fate, and until orders from Don Diablo, am your commander."

Does any man gainsay my authority? and Howard cast his piercing eyes over the crowd; but no one spoke, and he resumed:

"I will occupy the head-quarter cabin, and to-night come there, and I will pay you your shares of the fifty thousand pesos ransom I have for you."

"These," and he turned to the surprised El

Pirata, Mark Manly and Magdalene, "are poor unfortunates from the wreck yonder, and all who escaped, and I will lead them to the captives' quarters."

"Who is officer here under Valdós?"

"I am, señor," and El Cobre stepped forward.

"Then arrest Señor Valdós, put him in irons, and confine him in one of the cabins: then raise the shallop, with your men, and rescue the booty from the wreck."

"You shall be obeyed, señor capitán," responded El Cobre, and he turned toward the wrecker captain, who cried savagely:

"You shall die for this."

The report of a pistol followed, and Cosala fell dead; the shot had been aimed at Howard De Vigne, but, passing over his shoulder, had sunk into the brain of the wrecker.

All stood thunderstruck for an instant; but, without the quiver of a muscle, Howard De Vigne said calmly:

"That shot has cost you your life, Señor Valdós."

"Disarm him, men, and lead him away."

"Never! coward, it is your life I will have," and the Cuban rushed toward Howard De Vigne, his long, glittering knife in his hand.

El Cobre and several others sprung forward to intercept him; but the American waved them back, and seizing the knife quickly held out to him by the youth Guatil, he cried:

"Back, men! let him come on."

Almost instantly the knives clashed together with a vicious ring, and the two men were engaged in a combat to the death.

But the Cuban, feared as he was by all who knew him, and a tiger when aroused, had met his match in Howard De Vigne, who skillfully parried his every blow and thrust, and pressed him steadily back, step by step, until he could go no further, for the cliff was behind him.

There the two stood, their blades on guard, and eying each other with deadly intent; but the American seemed calm, and unfatigued, while the Cuban was panting and nervous.

Around them gathered the wreckers, and in their midst El Pirata, Mark Manly and Magdalene looked on with anxious, staring eyes, for upon Howard De Vigne their every hope was centered.

Pressing the fighting the American again brought the blades together, and the Cuban seemed to feel that his strength was failing him, for he cried out, fiercely:

"Your knife shall never touch my heart, señor, for thus I thwart you."

As he spoke he sprung quickly backward, and down over the cliff he went, his eyes looking defiance and hatred at the man who had been his victor.

One loud cry from every lip, and then a score of eyes looked down, and all heard the fatal *thud* as the form struck the rocks far below, and then bounded into the sea with a heavy plunge.

Then all turned their eyes upon the victor; but there was no quiver upon his dark, handsome face, as he gazed calmly down upon the blood-stained waters, beneath which had just sunk a man he had sent to his doom.

"Sail ho!"

It was Sancho, the light-keeper, that called out, and every one glanced seaward, where a vessel was visible a few leagues distant.

And Howard De Vigne looked at El Pirata, and he returned the significant look, for they both recognized the coming vessel.

It was the Sea Gipsy.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A COUNCIL OF WAR.

WHEN Howard De Vigne beheld the schooner, upon which he knew was Don Diablo, he slightly changed color; but to the wreckers he exhibited an assumed joy at the coming of the chief, and beckoning to Guatil to follow him, he led the way toward the cabins, El Pirata and the others slowly coming on behind, while El Cobre hastened to get his men to work on the sunken lugger.

Escorting the captives to their quarters, the same occupied by Colon I Tudor and his family, Howard De Vigne went to the cabin of the late wrecker captain, Guatil following him.

Throwing himself into a chair, he turned his piercing eyes upon the youth, and said, simply:

"Well, Guatil, what have you to say for yourself?"

"You know me, then, señor?" answered the lad, in an embarrassed way.

"Yes, as the Cuban, Nita Sabinas."

"True, I am that poor unfortunate girl, whose life Reno Quesala wrecked as fatally as is that hulk lying on the reef," replied the woman, as she is now known to be, in a tone full of sadness.

"Be seated, señora, and tell me why you are here," said Howard, in a kindly tone.

"I came here because you failed in your promise; you did not hang Don Diablo to the yard-arm."

"Would to God I had done so; but, no, I carried him to New York for trial, and—but I dare

not say more; sufficient be it for me to state that he escaped."

"So I learned; and, knowing that he was free again, I planned to track him, and taking passage in a vessel bound to San Augustine, I watched my chance, was towed to sea by a fishing smack one day, in a small boat, and headed for this island, and was picked up by the wreckers, whom I knew owed allegiance to Don Diablo."

"Well, no one believed me to be other than a boy, even Valdós, who was my boy-sweetheart long ago, for our father's estates joined, and he made me his servant, as it were, and I won his confidence by my seeming devotion to him, for I hoped to one day, through him, come face to face with Don Diablo."

"The rest you know, Señor Americano."

"You certainly hate Don Diablo?"

"I do, with all my heart."

"And so do I; so, now, to plot against him: what shall we do, for, within three or four hours, his vessel will be here?"

"After the bold game you played against Valdós, señor, I hardly need offer you aid; but it was done in a masterly way, though how you got back on the island, I know not."

In a few words Howard told the disguised maiden of what had happened after leaving the basin in the shallop, and that he had suddenly formed the idea of using the ring against the power of Valdós.

"It was well thought of, and splendidly executed, señor; but, how about the coming schooner?"

"We must arrange some plot; please go and ask Captain Waldron to come here with you."

The maiden obeyed, and Howard, with stern, set lips, and bowed head, paced to and fro in deep thought, for he felt that the end was coming; but what course to pursue he could not decide upon.

"Well, captain, we must hold a council of war; have no fear, for Guatil, here, knows who you are, and is our friend; be seated, please, for we must decide quickly."

"Do you think the wreckers would side with us?"

"Not against Don Diablo," put in Guatil.

"Then our only hope is to escape in some way from the island."

"Impossible, señor, as the boats all lie in the basin," said Guatil.

"Then I would kill Don Diablo, as he lands, and proclaim yourself chief, as you did so cleverly awhile since," again suggested El Pirata.

"Again impracticable, señor, as the schooner will not run in, there not being water enough on the reef, but anchor outside, and fire a gun for Señor Valdós to go out with the share of treasure that belongs to Don Diablo."

"Ha! if that is his way there will be no trouble, for I will go out to the schooner."

"But you will be recognized, De Vigne."

"No, captain, not if Guatil here tries his art at disguising me."

"But you are not Captain Valdós, señor," suggested Guatil.

"True, he is dead, and left me in command, and if I blind the Devil's eyes with gold, he will not mourn for the dead Valdós; let me see, Guatil, have you a key for this iron box?"

"No, señor, Captain Valdós had it with him."

"Then I will smash it open; now to my disguise, what shall it be?"

"There are suits of the Valdós here, and you are about his size."

"Then I will step into his clothes, and—"

"He has in a chest, señor, beards and wigs of all colors."

"Good! I will put those on, as I leave the basin, and that the men may not see me, will send them all up here for you to pay off, and row myself out to the schooner, unless you wish to act as boatman, captain."

"De Vigne, I dare not trust myself in the presence of that man, for I would spring upon him, be the consequences what they might."

"You know that I sailed with my wife for New Orleans; but you do not know that Don Diablo overhauled the lugger, and made me walk the plank—"

"Great God! Waldron, is this true?" cried Howard De Vigne.

"Ay, he had Consuelo ironed to walk the plank with me; but, seeing that she preferred to die with me to remain in his power, he held her back, and I went to the plunge alone."

"And Consuelo?" eagerly asked Howard De Vigne.

"Remained on the schooner, and God only knows what her fate has been," and the voice of the strong man sunk into a hoarse whisper, while his lips quivered with emotion.

"But how did you escape?"

"The man who ironed me was not the brute his master was, and he had filed the iron clasps, so that, though they closed, they could be pulled apart, and so he whispered to me."

"Down into the dark waters I went, dragged by a heavy shot; but by an effort I freed my hands and then my feet from the irons and chains, and rose to the surface under the schooner's stern."

"As she got under way I let go my hold, and struck out for the land, a league distant, and

reached it near the ranch of a Mexican who treated me most kindly, though he knew not my true story."

"Going to Corpus Christi I took passage on a lugger bound to New Orleans, where I found my drafts on that city had been drawn by Consuelo in person, accompanied by a man who claimed to be her husband, and in fact signed my own name, in indorsing them."

"But I had some money in New Orleans, which I drew, and started for New York to build me another vessel, in which to hunt down Don Diablo."

"But the schooner in which I sailed sprung a leak off the coast of Florida, and we abandoned her, and only last night our boat was picked up by the clipper-ship *St. John* that lies a wreck on the reef off this island."

"Now you know why I dare not face Don Diablo, until I am able to meet him upon equal terms."

"I will not ask it, but go alone; now, Guatil, let us see what this iron box contains," and after considerable difficulty Howard De Vigne managed to open the treasure chest of Valdós, the Wrecker.

All were surprised at the treasure exposed, for the wrecker captain had been most generous to himself, and gathering up about one-third, Howard said:

"This will be so much more than Don Diablo expects, that he will doubtless ask few questions; the balance, Guatil, please pay to the men in equal shares, and I will thereby be enabled to keep the money I have, and which I was going to give up as the pretended ransom of Colonel Tudor and his family."

"Now let me try my disguise, that you may see how it may pass the keen eyes of that fiend of the sea."

Guatil hastily produced the false beards and wigs, and selecting those he considered the best, Howard De Vigne put them on, and both El Pirata and the pretended youth pronounced it a perfect disguise.

"Now then to face the Devil; but, if I am discovered, he shall die," said Howard De Vigne, in a tone that showed he meant it.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

DON DIABLO AT HOME.

"FIRE a gun, Ramirez, and wake those lazy land-lubbers up, for I have not seen a soul moving on the island," said Don Diablo, as he stood on the deck of his vessel and lowered his glass from his eye.

The gun was charged and fired, and its deep roar sent the sea-birds flying from the rocks, and echoed and re-echoed along the bold shores of the islands.

"Now luff up and drop anchor, for I do not like running too far into this devil's trap," ordered the chief, and the command was obeyed, and the schooner lay at anchor in the main channel, about half a league from the shore.

"Give them another gun, Ramirez!" impatiently ordered Don Diablo, and again the deep boom of the cannon resounded along the shores.

"Curse them! call away a boat, Ramirez, and I will go ashore and see what is the matter with Valdós," and the chief descended to his cabin to prepare to go ashore, when he was recalled to the deck by the report that a boat was coming out.

"I see it, and it has only one occupant; I do not understand this," said Don Diablo, with suspicion, and he added:

"Valdós always rowed out in state, to try and make me feel his importance; but that is not Valdós," and he again took a long look through his glass, and watched the little skiff as it came through the reef, and then out into the main channel.

"He pulls with a strong stroke, whoever he is; stand ready there, to throw him a rope!"

The next instant the skiff ran alongside of the schooner, a rope was thrown, and the boatman called out in commanding tones:

"Here, lads, pass up this treasure, and, mind you, don't let your fingers stick to it, for it's your chief's."

"Well said, my man; what, are you bringing me the contents of a Spanish galleon your False Beacon has lured to wreck?"

"Never mind, every peso is welcome, if it come stained with the blood of holy padres; now, my man, come into my cabin, and tell me who you are, and where is the Captain Valdós?" and the delighted Don Diablo led the way into his cabin, followed by the boatman, and several of the crew bearing the treasure he had brought with him.

"Put that metal there, lads; now, señor, refresh yourself with wine, or brandy, to suit your taste, and tell me the news."

The man dashed off a glass of brandy in an indifferent way, and taking a seat, so that the light from the companionway did not fall upon him, answered:

"Sad news, captain, for Señor Valdós is dead."

"What! the handsome, dashing Valdós dead?"

"True, captain; he committed suicide by springing over the cliff on which stands the False Beacon."

"His conscience doubtless troubled him, though I hardly expected that of Valdós; and how left he his estates, señor?"

"He left a goodly sum, captain, which, excepting what was divided among the band, you have here."

"They doubtless got the lion's share," growled Don Diablo.

"No, señor, the lion gets his share, for you have a fortune right here on this table."

"You are right, and I will not grumble; but who commands the wreckers now?"

"I do, señor captain."

"I thought one El Cabre was next in command."

"He was, captain; but the men seemed to prefer me."

"And El Cabre?"

"Still holds the rank he did before, señor."

"And Captain Valdós left this treasure to me as conscience-money, having cheated me out of my just shares?"

"Oh no, captain; he left no instructions; but when I took his place, as you were chief, I brought to you that which I deemed your due."

"You are an honest man, and I will give you the guarantee—but you have a ring, señor; may I ask where you got that?"

"The Señor Valdós had—"

"Ah, yes; you recovered his body and took off the ring."

To the visitor this surmise of Don Diablo was a most agreeable one, for he had the ring of office upon his finger; but he showed no emotion at the escape he had made, and answered:

"Yes, captain, the Señor Valdós fell upon the rocks."

"What a pity to mar so handsome a face and form as he had; but tell me, señor—you did not tell me your name—"

"Pedro Sanchez, captain."

"Ah! Señor Sanchez, or rather Captain Sanchez, what force have you on the island now?"

"Forty men, señor; but they are busy to-day repairing the damages of the storm to our small craft in the basin; will you not go ashore, señor captain, and be my guest for the night?"

"No, thank you, Sanchez; this vessel is my home now, and I am determined not to leave it, except under extraordinary circumstances; but I am always at home here to my friends or foes; is that wreck I see on the reef the result of a late storm?"

"Yes, captain; it is the St. John of New York, a packet ship."

"Ah! I chased the vessel once; there must have been passengers."

"I have a lady and two gentlemen ashore; they were the only survivors."

"A lady, eh; handsome?"

"Not ill-favored, captain."

"Rich?"

"Yes, I think so, and shall demand good ransom, which you shall have upon your next visit to the island, as well also your share in the St. John's cargo, which I shall have had returns from in a couple of months; will you return as soon as that, señor?"

"Possibly, though I expect to make a run from here up the Atlantic coast as far as Charleston, and then around the Bermudas, the eastern end of Cuba, pass a few weeks in the Caribbean, and then follow the Mexican coast around to Vera Cruz, where, if I have not had a successful cruise, I will levy on an old Jew who lives there—"

"Jacobi Douro?"

"Yes; you know him?"

"He is the Vera Cruz agent to whom we send our cargoes for disposal; but I detain you, captain, so will take my leave," and the visitor arose.

"Well, I confess I do not like this locality for a vessel, even in calm weather, and generally hasten away; have another glass of brandy before you go, señor."

The invitation was accepted, the liquor was dashed off, and grasping the hand which Don Diablo extended, the visitor went on deck, and from thence into his boat.

"You are not as stylish as Captain Valdós, señor, for he came aboard with a full crew," called out Don Diablo.

"The men are all busy in the basin, captain; *adios*," and, waving his hand in farewell, Howard De Vigne pulled rapidly shoreward, while the schooner at once got under way and stood in a northerly direction.

"Go on, thou red-handed fiend in thy red work; but thy days are numbered," and removing his beard and wig Howard De Vigne headed for the channel through the reef, a great weight removed from his heart, for he had passed through a fearful ordeal, which he had hardly dared hope would prove successful.

CHAPTER XL.

PUT TO THE TEST.

WHEN Howard De Vigne rowed into the basin the men all looked up from their work, and all who had held any suspicion of him were now satisfied that they had been wrong.

The lugger had been raised and was dragged up on the beach for repairs, and in a few ple-

sant words the young sailor complimented them upon their rapid work, and then asked:

"Did you get your money, lads?"

"We did, señor, and thank you, sir; the lad paid us more to-day than the Señor Valdós gave us in a year, and to-night we'll drink your health in some of the old wine we have stowed away in the cavern," answered El Cabre.

"Don't go it too strong, lads, for when the wine is in the wit is out, you know; but who is the light-keeper?"

"I am, señor," said Sancho, stepping forward.

"Well, my lad, you need not light the Beacon again until I tell you, for Chief Don Diablo says a search expedition is to be sent to find us out, and to-morrow you must get the cargo out of the wreck and then set the hull on fire, so it will not attract the attention of a passing vessel."

So saying, Howard passed on up the hill toward the glen, fully satisfied with having invented an excuse that would prevent the loss of any other vessels through trusting in the False Beacon.

Going straight to his cabin he found there Guatil, who welcomed him most warmly, while he said:

"The Señor Manly and his wife have been most anxious regarding your safety, señor, and begged me to tell them of your return, so I reported that you had left the schooner."

"I will go over and see them; but where is Captain Waldron?"

"On the Beacon Rock I left him, señor."

"Seek him, please, Guatil, for so I will call you, as you seem to still wish to preserve your *incognito*."

"Yes, señor, I care for no one else to know me as other than I appear, a lad."

"I will not betray you; now ask Captain Waldron to join me here, please."

Guatil darted away, and Howard walked over to the cabin assigned to Mark Manly and his wife, and was met by them at the door, while Magdalene said, earnestly:

"Oh, how glad we are to know that you passed the gantlet of that man's eyes in safety."

"Yes, De Vigne, we were most anxious about you—don't misunderstand me, not about ourselves, but *you*, for I assure you I am not the man I was when I cruelly insulted you in New York, and you so generously spared my life."

"Your shot, which so nigh sent me to my grave, set me to thinking, and this little darling proved such a devoted nurse that I made her my wife as soon as I recovered, although she told me what she had done to get you out of prison; come, let the dead past bury its dead, forgive me all, and take my hand as that of a friend."

The generous tone of Mark Manly, and his frank manner, caused Howard De Vigne to at once grasp his hand, and say:

"Yes, with you, I say let the past be forgotten; but come to my cabin, for I see Guatil and the captain approaching, and I wish to settle upon some plan of action, for we must leave here as soon as possible."

As they reached the cabin they met Guatil and Captain Waldron, and the latter said, quietly:

"Do you recognize this ring, De Vigne?"

"Yes, it is the same that Valdós wore."

"True; the waves washed his body upon the western rocks, and seeing it, I went down and reached it; these documents may perhaps interest you," and he handed over a bundle of letters, which Howard glanced over, while a strange light came into his eyes.

"They are invaluable, captain, and decide me upon a plan of action which I think will prove successful; if not, we must in some way manage to escape from the island and leave the wreckers to themselves," and having read the letters aloud, they all entered into a discussion as to the best plan to pursue, for they felt that one mistake made with the wild band would be like a spark in a magazine, and what could they do, if the suspicion and anger of two-score reckless outlaws were aroused?

"Guatil, ask the men to come to my cabin, all of them, at sunset; you, my friends, had best retire to your quarters to avoid suspicion," said Howard, and the others having left, he paced to and fro until voices warned him that the wreckers were approaching.

Meeting them at the door, he ran his fearless eyes over the crowd, allowing them to momentarily meet the gaze of each man, and then said in his clear, distinct tones, that those in the other cabins, so deeply interested, also heard:

"Lads, you know but little of me, but I am determined you shall know me better, for I intend to save your necks from the gallows."

Each man was now deeply interested, and the crowd drew closer, while Howard De Vigne continued:

"You have lived here, leading a life of fiendish crime, for a few pesos in gold, while your leaders have been reaping fortunes—fortunes made out of the misery and death of others."

"And one of those leaders had already arranged to betray you—"

Savage exclamations here momentarily in-

terrupted the speaker; but after a pause he went on:

"I have here the written proofs that he had plotted to betray you into the hands of a Spanish vessel, and for it he was to receive a large sum in gold and a pardon; here are the letters of correspondence which you can read, found among his effects."

"Within two weeks that vessel is to be here; but they will not find you when they come, for I wish you to go with me."

"In what service, captain?" asked El Cabre.

"In a service that I pledge you will pay you well, and gain you a pardon for the past; what say you, lads?"

A wild shout went up from the crowd, and El Cabre cried:

"You've struck us square, captain; we have hearts, though we are wreckers, and if you pledge us good service, and no questions asked, we'll follow you."

Another shout greeted the words of El Cabre, and Howard De Vigne said:

"I thank you, lads; in the morning a part of you go to work on the cargo of the ship, and the balance put the lugger in perfect trim, and load her with what we can carry from the packet ship."

"In one week we sail from Wreckers' Island."

Another cheer was given, and the wreckers turned away, while Howard De Vigne reëntered the cabin, to meet the tearful, yet joyous face of Guatil, who had seen and heard all, while she said, in a low, earnest tone:

"Señor, now I know that the days of Don Diablo are numbered."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE RETURN.

SHORTLY after dark, one stormy night some three weeks after the scenes related as having transpired upon Wreckers' Island, a lugger swept in past the San Juan d'Uloa and dropped anchor in the harbor of Vera Cruz, not very far from the shore, and at a point above where the mass of vessels were anchored.

Though, to an ordinary observer, differing little from the ordinary vessels of her class, to a true seaman's eye the lugger presented a trimmer build, longer masts, and a capacity for spreading far more canvas than was usually set on a mere coaster, and she was handled, as she came into the harbor, in no lubberly manner but in a masterly style.

After dropping anchor a boat was lowered and four of the half-dozen muffled forms on her deck entered it and were pulled shoreward by one oarsman.

"Wait here, Sancho, or in yonder *pulperia*, where you can refresh yourself," said one of the party, handing the oarsman a piece of gold and pointing to a sailor's lodging-house and saloon not far away.

"Thank you, captain; you will find me there when I am needed," was the reply, as the four he had brought ashore moved up into the town, their cloaks drawn closely around them, as though to keep out the chill air and rain.

As though thoroughly acquainted with the city, the four friends set off at a brisk walk, and in a few moments stopped before a dingy-looking building, the door of which was closed, but through the glass window of which were visible specimens of nearly every small article manufactured, from a compass to a crucifix.

A rap at the door brought in response the keen-eyed, saucy-faced Emanuel, the boy-of-all-work in the shop of Jacobi Douro, who, seeing four visitors muffled to the ears, started back in affright, and glanced at a huge blunderbuss near at hand, as if threatening to use it, though he feared it as much as he did the intruders.

"I would see the Señor Jacobi, Emanuel."

The giving of his name, and in a polite tone, reassured Emanuel, and he answered:

"The señor is out."

"Then, ask the Señora Waldron if she will see me."

"There is no such lady here, señor."

"Ah! I had forgotten; I mean the Señorita Consuelo."

"Who shall I say, señor?"

The stranger made no reply, but simply revealed his face, and the lad at once invited the party in, while he dashed away on his errand, kindly motioning them to seats upon two bundles of old clothes and a coffin, which some unfortunate had pawned.

"The señorita says come up at once," was the remark of Emanuel upon his return, and bidding the others await him, the one who had spoken ascended the stairs, and upon entering the room was warmly welcomed by Consuelo, who said, earnestly:

"I am so glad you have come as soon as you received my father's letter."

"I received no letter from your father, señor."

"What! why, he wrote you, Señor De Vigne, to the Wreckers' Island."

"It did not reach me then, for I have just arrived to-night, and—"

"Alas! you know not then my affliction," and the beautiful head was bowed in grief.

"I had heard that you were captured by Don Diablo."

"Ah! you have heard then that poor Jack is dead."

"I know that Don Diablo forced him to walk the plank, señora; but he did that once before and escaped."

"Ah, yes, but, alas! not this time, for how could he, ironed as he was?"

"I cannot believe that Captain Waldron died that way, señora."

"Señor De Vigne, do not raise my hopes to blast them," and Consuelo spoke almost angrily.

"I do not intend to, señora; I heard of your trouble from one who witnessed the affair, and he said that when the irons were placed on Captain Waldron the executioner whispered something to him, and—"

"God of Israel! I recall that now, and we were near the shore! Ah, señor! you know something of my husband, and that he did not die."

"Tell me, señor, tell me, and I will fall at your feet and worship you."

The beautiful woman dropped on her knees as she spoke, and raised her clasped hands to Howard De Vigne, who was deeply moved by her mingled hope and dread, and answered in a low voice, while he raised her up:

"Señora, I do know of your husband; he did escape."

With perfect abandon of joy she threw her arms around Howard's neck, and burying her face upon his broad breast, burst into a flood of tears.

He waited until she was calm once more, and then said:

"Señora, your husband I would not allow to come with me until I knew all, for he did not know what your fate may have been."

She understood him, and said proudly:

"Señor Americano, tell my husband that I am his true wife; tell him that my gold saved me from death by my own hand, for, had there been no hope of escape from the power of Don Diablo, I would have driven the dagger he gave me to my heart."

"And, señor, even now my father has gone to do that which never before did he do in his life—that is, play a gambling game, that he may try to win with cards, at *monté*, a vessel now in this harbor, and which the owner will not sell."

"Your father buying a vessel, or rather gambling to win one, lady?" asked Howard, in surprise.

"Yes, señor, at my request; and that is why he wrote to you, to place you in command of it, that you might hunt down Don Diablo."

"Señora Waldron, that is why I came to Vera Cruz; in a word, I went among the wreckers to rescue one whom I knew they held captive, and accident made me their leader, and face to face I met Don Diablo, who came off the island in the Sea Gipsy, your husband's vessel."

"Two weeks ago I sailed from there with two-score brave wreckers, two shipwrecked people, a lad, who, like you, seeks revenge upon Don Diablo, and—"

"Go on, señor; why do you pause?" she asked, eagerly.

"And one Jack Waldron."

"Israel's God, I thank Thee!"

"He was picked up at sea, and then wrecked on the island; but he will tell you his own story."

"Now, down-stairs with me are two American friends of mine, and the lad of whom I spoke—"

"And Jack, señor; Jack, my husband, where is he?"

"On board the lugger, señora; but I will return and bring him here to-night; now I crave your hospitality for my friends."

"They shall have it, for we have ample room, señor; ask them up at once, for your friends are the friends of Jacobi and Consuelo."

Howard De Vigne instantly obeyed, and in a moment Consuelo had extended a warm welcome to Mark Manly, Magdalene and Guatil, the last two being in male attire, for on the lugger the latter had made known her sex, and been given the aft cabin with Mrs. Manly.

"You are my guests now, for I just told Señor De Vigne that his friends are my friends, and I will order refreshments at once; but you, señor—" and she turned to Howard with a pleading look, which he understood, for he said:

"Will go at once, señora," and he left the house and swiftly wended his way back to the shore, where he found Sancho waiting, and was put on board the lugger.

"Come, Jack, all is arranged; your wife awaits you," he said, joyfully, and from Jack Waldron's inmost soul came the words:

"Thank God!"

"El Cabre!"

"Si, señor," and the wrecker officer entered the cabin.

"There is a chance of at once securing a splendid vessel that is in port—"

"Sancho was telling me, señor, he heard in the *pulperia* of an American armed yacht, that an American gentleman had lost at *monté* to Major-Commandante Navaro, and it might be bought for a good sum."

"He says the watermen say she's a beauty, sails like a tornado, and I know the lads would put their cash in the locker, should you need more funds."

"No, my good friend, I have sufficient, or can get it; now I leave you in command, and tell the lads I hate to keep them bound below decks, but will soon release them."

"Oh, they don't mind a little squeeze, señor, for they come up half a dozen at a time to get fresh air; will you return to night, señor?"

"Yes, by dawn at furthest, and I leave you in charge, El Cabre," and springing into the boat, in which El Pirata was already seated, Howard bade Sancho pull once more for the shore, and on the way heard his story about the famous schooner.

Landing, the two friends went straight to the house of Jacobi; but, upon the meeting of the husband and wife, so cruelly parted, so strangely met, I will not speak, for their joy was too sacred to intrude upon, but will go on to state that having gained the address of the club, where Jacobi could be found, Howard De Vigne left the Jew's house, accompanied by Mark Manly, and sought the gilded Hall of Chance.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE TURN OF A CARD.

THE gilded Hall of Chance in Vera Cruz was crowded, notwithstanding the stormy night, with all the sports and gentlemen gamblers of the city, for of late some intensely interesting games had been played, and the Major-Commandante Navaro, formerly a heavy loser in all games of chance, had of late been a steady winner, and had ruined several young men of the town, so rumor said, by his good luck.

Having won the armed yacht of an American of wealth, who had put into Vera Cruz, Fernando had refused to sell it even to his own government, but had shown a willingness to stake it against a large sum of money.

In this, however, he found no takers for awhile; but at last he gave out that Jacobi Douro, the Jew money-lender, had sent him word that he would put the sum named against his yacht, and play him for it on a certain night.

This was the cause of the large gathering that night of storm, and, to the surprise of all, Jacobi Douro had promptly put in an appearance, his money in hand, and his face pale but determined.

What he wanted with the vessel no one could conjecture; but he seemed determined to have it, and a table was assigned to him and the major, and all other games stopped to see this one played.

Though not a gambler, the Jew showed no ignorance of the game, and played steadily and coolly, although the sum put up was double the worth of the yacht.

At last the game of *monté* ended and the major-commandante said sneeringly:

"I have won, señor, and it does me good to finger your money, without having your fingers on a piece of paper to which my autograph is attached."

"You can finger more of it, señor, for I stake the same sum once more against the yacht," was the Jew's cool remark, but instantly he said:

"I will stake you to the amount I have made clear off of you, my major; then I will not really have lost anything of my wealth, excepting what you brought in."

And again the game began, the spectators crowding round with more interest than before.

As this second game commenced two persons entered the hallway below, and a muffled form standing there stepped before them, and said in Spanish, yet with a foreign accent:

"Señors, I beg that you pay for me the entrance fee, that I may stake the small amount I have once more to try my fortune in that hell above, where I have lost my wealth, my all, ay, and almost my honor."

There was something in the man's manner that caused the two he addressed to stop, and turning toward him, as he stood under the bright light, they saw a man in the shabby-gentle habiliments of an American, and the face and air of a gentleman.

"Great heavens! Captain Carter Dewy, is it you?" exclaimed one of the men in surprise.

The one he addressed looked quickly into his face, and answered in a low tone:

"You are Howard De Vigne?"

"I am, and glad to meet you, and serve you, as I feel that you need aid; this is my friend, Mr. Manly, of New York, Captain Dewy."

"I have seen Mr. Manly before, and am glad to meet him, but I thought that—"

Captain Dewy paused, evidently embarrassed, and Howard said with a smile:

"Go on, captain; you thought that Manly and myself were not good friends; true, but that is in the past, and we are the best of friends now; but how is it I find you here?"

"You mean comparatively in rags, and penury?" said the other, bitterly.

"Yes, for I know you were rich, and I have not forgotten that you were one of my stanch friends in my troubles."

"I believed there was some mistake, De Vigne, for I knew you too well to think you

had intentionally freed a pirate like Don Diablo."

"Thank you, captain; now come, let us go above into the saloon, for I intend to try my luck to-night."

"Howard De Vigne, do not do it; look at me, and see a man ruined from love of gambling."

"I had a fortune, and I came here on a cruise, in my own armed yacht, Government having granted me a year's leave."

"To-night I have five pesos, and I was going to tempt Fortune with those; if Fortune turned her back on me, I had this to end my days."

The man spoke impressively, and as he concluded, drew from his breast a pistol.

"No, no, Dewy, it is not as bad as that, for there are better days for you, I pledge you."

"I am no gambler; but once before I tempted Fortune, and intend to do so again to-night merely to gain possession of something I cannot secure otherwise; that is, if it is not won by another person; by the way, you came here in your armed yacht; did you lose it gambling?"

"Yes, to Major Navaro, a man I believe to be a cheat, for, until lately he always lost instead of won; but what his underhand method is no one can find out, and they believe him honest."

"Ah, forearmed is forewarned, if I have to play him; it is your yacht I came here to play for."

"He wants a high stake against it."

"He shall have it; come!" and Howard De Vigne led the way up-stairs, followed by his two companions, whose entrance fees of five pesos he paid at the door.

The second game for the yacht had ended when they entered, and there was considerable excitement in the room; but they heard, as they advanced toward the table:

"Señor, they say there is luck the third time, and in odd numbers, so I will play you another game for the yacht."

It was Jacobi Douro who spoke, and instantly Major Navaro answered indifferently:

"Very well, Jacobi; I tell you I love to finger your gold."

With surprise at the recklessness of Jacobi Douro, whose love of money was well known to all in Vera Cruz, the crowd gathered closely around once more; but Howard and his two companions had managed to secure stands near the table, and looking up, Jacobi Douro espied him and started.

But the look on Howard's face caused him to check his intended recognition, and he settled himself to his game, playing with more courage than before, as he felt he had a friend near, for the Jew well knew public opinion was against him on account of his race, as, though many there had gone to him, when driven to the wall for funds, and pleaded with him for gold, they hated him piously.

But the game, though played through most cautiously by Jacobi Douro, ended as the others had done, in the favor of the fortunate major, and the Jew turned away with disgust and disappointment upon his face; but quickly he halted, and the noisy hum of voices ceased as a clear voice said:

"Pardon, señor, but as you are in luck to-night, perhaps you are willing to test it further?"

It was Howard De Vigne that spoke, and he stepped suddenly in front of the Mexican major-commandante.

Fernando Navaro started, and at first seemed about to resent this intrusion of a perfect stranger as insolence; but there was something in the face and bearing of the tall, handsome man before him, that caused him to check an angry retort that arose to his lips, and he said, with coldness, yet politely:

"I have not the honor of the señor's acquaintance."

"Permit me to request that my friend, Captain Dewy, whom you know, present me to you," and Howard turned toward the man whom the Mexican had rendered poor by winning from him a fortune.

"Certainly, Major-Commandante Navaro, this gentleman is Lieutenant Howard De Vigne, an American, and my friend."

The major bowed stiffly, and replied:

"I am glad to meet your friends, Captain Dewy; but, for their own sake, I would advise that they do not try to break my run of luck, for just now I am the pet of the fickle Goddess of Fortune."

"Still, señor, I am willing to risk my chances with you; I am a stranger in your city, never gambled but once before in my life, and would be honored if you would oblige me."

"Willingly, but I have warned you; why, I have just won a fortune from one of the moneyed institutions of our city, the Señor Jacobi Douro, one of the lost tribe of Israel, who, though a rolling stone, has managed to gather moss."

The sycophants of the major laughed at his sarcasm thrown at Jacobi; but the Jew smiled grimly, and drew near the table, those around giving him room, on account of his losses.

All was now intense interest, and every eye was turned upon Howard De Vigne, who, with Mark Manly and Captain Dewy upon one side of him, and Jacobi Douro upon the other, took his stand at the table, calm to indifference.

A new pack of cards were called for by Howard De Vigne, who took them, and leisurely and critically examined them, which called forth the remark from Major Navaro, accompanied by a sneer:

"You do not seem to put much confidence in our Mexican cards, señor."

"No; do you object to their examination?" and Howard fixed his fearless eyes full upon the face of the Mexican, who flushed slightly, and replied haughtily:

"I do not care to be misunderstood; the Señor Americano is welcome to the closest scrutiny of the cards."

"I have made it, and am ready," was the cool reply.

Then the major asked:

"What sum, señor?"

"Name it yourself, my dear major."

"Say ten thousand pesos?"

"Ten, twenty, or fifty, it matters not to me, señor," and the reply of Howard De Vigne nerved the crowd up to the highest pitch of excitement, for they knew their countryman had no back down in him.

"Thirty let it be, then," and the game commenced, Howard De Vigne watching every movement of his antagonist, rather than the cards.

At the end of the game the American was the loser, and the sympathy of the Mexicans was shown by a happy hum that went round the room.

"Again, señor?" asked Major Navaro.

"With pleasure; say twenty thousand."

Again the game was played and lost by Howard De Vigne, and the Mexican said, with his usual sneer:

"My Jewish friend, Jacobi, there, says there is luck in odd numbers; will you test it, Señor Americano?"

"Willingly; for five thousand let it be."

And Howard lost it; and seeing that he had come down in his figures, both Captain Dewy and Mark Manly tried to get him to desist, while the crowd seemed to feel that he had little left.

"The adage went against me, señor; is it worth your while to play for a thousand pesos?" and Howard had that amount in his hands, after counting out the sum won by Major Navaro.

"I will oblige you, señor; but I warn you that just now I am the pet of Fortune."

"The Goddess of Fortune is more fickle than a woman; but thanks for your kindness in obliging me by playing for so small a sum," and Howard was as cool as when he began.

And again the game was played, and the thousand was lost by Howard, who smilingly said:

"Señor, you certainly are most fortunate, for you have won my entire wealth; but I have here a ring of great beauty and value, which I will stake against—say, ten thousand dollars," and Howard smilingly held forth his hand for the major to look at the ruby ring, while his *sang-froid* manner over his losses won the admiration of nearly all present, for they saw that Mark Manly and Captain Dewy were distressed, and even Jacobi Douro seemed nervous, and looked more anxious than he had over his own losses.

"It is a gem I have never seen equaled, and the setting is most unique, and I will stake the sum you name against it, señor, with pleasure," said Major Navaro.

"Thanks, major-commandante; but allow me to ask first for wine for the gentlemen present." But the Mexican host demurred, saying audibly:

"The Señor Americano said he had lost his fortune; how then can he pay for wine for two hundred persons?"

"Out of my winnings," said Howard, who had overheard the remark.

"But you have won nothing, señor."

"But I shall."

The Mexican shrugged his shoulders, and Howard turned to Mark Manly, and said:

"Manly, will you be my banker?"

"Willingly—"

"Permit me to be the señor's security; bring the wine, Voxal."

It was brought, those present drinking a toast to the American openly, but meaning it for the major-commandante, and the game commenced and was slowly played through, the Mexican with his sneering smile seeming reckless of the result, and Howard De Vigne stern and indifferent.

The burst of astonishment at the conclusion of the game showed which way it had gone—the Mexican had lost.

Howard De Vigne showed no triumph in his face, but said, coolly:

"The ring and the ten thousand now, major."

The assent was given with a frown, for the losing of the former game seemed to surprise and annoy him, although on former occasions he had lost thousands without the tremor of a muscle.

And again the game was begun, played and lost—for Major Navaro. Coolly counting out the amount charged for the wine, and, paying it,

Howard once more staked his ring and the balance of the money, and once more won, amid the hum of excitement that went through the room.

He had now regained what he had lost, with some over, and again put the entire sum, with the ring, upon the table for the major to cover with an equal amount, which he did, although his face had grown black with passion.

"The American wins!" was the shout at the end of the last game, and Major Navaro turned from the table, his face livid.

"Hold! señor commandante, we play again," said Howard, sternly.

"No, no, De Vigne, let well enough alone," whispered Captain Dewy.

"Yes, De Vigne, you have won a fortune; let us go," added Mark Manly.

But Howard smiled pleasantly, and again called to the Mexican:

"You play again, señor?"

"No!" came the fierce reply.

"I played to my last peso; are you a coward that you refuse?" came the stinging query, and a silence as though death had strode into the vast saloon followed the words.

"*Nombre de Dios!* No! I will play you until one of us is beggared, and then hold you responsible for your insult thrown in my teeth," shouted the Mexican, and stepping up to the table he said, savagely:

"Name your sum!"

"My ring and my winnings."

"Enough!"

In perfect silence the gambling scene began, and in a *furor* it ended, for once more the American was the winner.

"Again, señor major-commandante," said Howard De Vigne, in his pleasantest manner, and he placed the ring and vast pile of notes on the table.

"You go beyond my cash now, señor," said Navaro, moodily.

"What sum will you stake?"

"One hundred thousand pesos."

"Against my ring and ninety; so be it," and the major's money once more changed hands, while, through his set teeth, he hissed:

"*Nombre de Dios!* I am ruined!"

"No, señor, you own a handsome yacht," suggested Howard.

"I will not play for that," was the angry retort.

"You forced my friend, Captain Dewy, to put it up as a stake, after you had won all his money."

"I will not stake the yacht."

"If you do not, you are a coward."

"What!" and the Mexican half-sprung toward the American, whose voice rung out threateningly, as he cried:

"Hold, señor, do not dare me, even in your own land; I repeat, swallow my words, or stake the yacht."

"You have there an accursed *luck-stone*; take it off the table and I will stake the yacht, for no man shall say I am a coward."

Howard De Vigne smiled and said:

"Señor, I will stake the ring and all I have won against your yacht."

"No."

"Do you fear a simple ruby?"

"I fear nothing; I will play as you propose," and with firm-set teeth, Major Navaro turned to his game; but, with haggard eyes and pallid as a corpse he turned away, for once more he had lost.

"Señor, my yacht lies at anchor, I believe, near the Mexican cruiser, *Cherucca*; I will take possession of her in the morning at ten; please inform your sailing-master to that effect."

All now gazed upon Howard De Vigne as though there was something of the supernatural about him, and even Captain Dewy and Mark Manly were thunderstruck, while Jacobi Douro could not suppress the intense delight that pervaded him.

"Señor Americano, a word with you," and Major Navaro strode up to Howard De Vigne, who answered indifferently:

"With pleasure, señor."

"You have thrown an insult in my face, and I demand a meeting, for no retraction will do," hissed the Mexican.

"None shall be given, señor, and more, I decline a meeting with you."

"What! are you then a coward?" and the Mexican spoke loud enough for several to hear him.

"Oh, no, but I never meet as a gentleman one whom I know to be a cheat and a murderer."

Fernando Navaro was now wild with rage, and seemed about to spring upon the American, to tear him in pieces; but something in the eye of Howard De Vigne held him at bay, and he said with suppressed passion:

"Curse you, what mean you?"

"Simply, that I discovered your little trick in playing, and thwarted you each time; and more, I know *why* a sergeant and two men were shot for El Pirata's escape; don't drive me, dear major, to make public that which would cost you your life," and Howard De Vigne turned away, and followed by his two companions left the Hall of Fortune.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE TWO SCHOONERS.

WHEN Howard De Vigne left the Hall of Fortune, accompanied by Mark Manly and Captain Dewy, he wended his way in the direction of the home of Jacobi Douro; but hearing rapid footsteps coming after, the three paused, and soon a form came in sight.

"It is Jacobi the Jew; well, señor, now I greet you with pleasure," and Howard extended his hand, which the Jew grasped warmly, and said:

"And rejoiced am I to see you, señor."

"Land of Israel! but you have nerve, and it has brought you a fortune—and the schooner-yacht."

"It was the yacht I went there to win, señor, so I give back to you what you lost in the effort—"

"No, no—"

"Yes, yes, for I would not keep your gold, nor that of my friend Captain Dewy here, for I won back for him his losses, and enough to pay him for his yacht, which I have to take off of his hands for a little service; allow me to present you, gentlemen," and Howard introduced his two friends to the Jew, who at once invited them to his home.

"Ah! we have anticipated your invitation, señor; at least Manly and myself have, for his wife, and two more of my friends are there, one of them being no other than—who do you suppose?"

"The God of my fathers knows."

"One you believed dead—"

"El Pirata!"

"The same."

The Jew halted suddenly, for they had been walking along as they talked, and his lips moved as though in a prayer of thanks, while he said in a tone almost inaudible:

"Now will there joy come once more to my poor Consuelo."

"Yes, she is more than happy, but here we are."

A knock from Jacobi brought Emanuel to the door, his eyes half-closed with sleep, for it was after midnight, and in the gorgeous chambers of the Jew a happy party were soon assembled, while Howard De Vigne took out his winnings, and counted out the sums lost to the major by the Israelite and Captain Dewy, insisting that if they did not take the money he would return it to Fernando Navaro.

This quickly decided them, and a laugh followed at their eagerness to appropriate that which they were determined the Mexican should not lay clutches on again.

"Now, Dewy, as time is flying, let me ask you what you paid for your yacht, for I intend keeping her for a special purpose?"

"She was built in New York, after a model of one purchased by a Mexican captain for his service—I believe his name was Waldros."

Howard De Vigne glanced significantly at El Pirata, and asked:

"Who was the builder, captain?"

"The noted cruiser-builder, Fulton."

"Ah! and her tonnage?"

"Two hundred."

"And she was just like the Mexican craft?"

"The twin of it, even to rig and armament, for Fulton was so pleased with his work on the Mexican that he laid the keel of my schooner before the other had her masts in."

"Are any of your crew now in Vera Cruz?"

"Yes, a score or more of them, poor fellows; but fortunately I paid them off before I lost my money, and some of them have shipped in different vessels."

"I believe you were cruising for pleasure, captain?"

Carter Dewy hesitated for a moment, and then said:

"De Vigne, after your kindness to-night, I will not refuse to tell you what service I was on."

"I had a leave of a year, and at my own expense armed, equipped and manned my schooner; but I asked of the Government a roving commission to hunt down the wreckers and pirates of the Gulf, and it was given me, but see how I abused it."

"Name your price for the craft, captain?"

"She is yours already, De Vigne."

"No, I wish to pay you the sum she cost you."

"De Vigne, I make her a present to you."

"Upon one condition I accept it."

"Name it."

"This gentleman is Captain Jack Waldron, formerly of the Mexican service, and for him Fulton built the craft, of which yours is a model, and Don Diablo, the Red Rover, now commands her, for he cleverly captured her."

"Your schooner I want to cruise after this chief, who you remember escaped when in my charge, and for which escape I was dismissed from the navy as you know, with the stigma that I was bribed by him."

"This I intend now to refute, by carrying back in irons Don Diablo, and that is why I need your vessel."

"You shall have it, De Vigne, and gladly, and I will join you, if so you please."

"That is what I was coming to; Waldron

goes as my first, and you shall have the berth of second lieutenant, if you will accept it."

"Willingly, and I don't deserve that for having made such a consummate fool of myself; in the mean time let them at home believe I have committed suicide, turned pirate, wrecker, or anything," said Carter Dewy, bitterly.

"Wrecker you cannot turn, at least on the Bahamas, for I captured that band and have them now on a lugger in the harbor, and they are to form my crew on your vessel, for in the morning I shall take possession of the yacht, and run her up to an anchorage near my wreck-er craft."

"Señor, have you no berth for me on your vessel?" asked a soft voice, and turning, Howard discovered Nita Sabinas, no longer in male attire, but clothed in a becoming suit which Consuelo had prevailed upon her to put on.

"No, señorita, the duty we go on must needs be such as only stern men may meet; you remain in Vera Cruz until I bring you word that Don Diablo is no more—that you have been avenged," said Howard, kindly.

With a sigh Nita Sabinas turned away, but there was in her face some stern resolve that those who saw it could not fathom.

CHAPTER XLIV.

LED TO RUIN.

THE springtime had come, and the migratory birds were flying from the sunny clime of the South to the far North; the balmy, perfume-laden breezes floated from the shores over the waters of the Gulf, and all nature, on sea and land, seemed lulled into cheery repose.

Even a stately brigantine, with all her canvas set, moved slowly along over the waters, as though unwilling to disturb their placidity with her sharp prows.

A close glance at this vessel, and the reader recognizes the Vidette, cruising along the southern shores of the Isle of Cuba, and within sight of the land, for a short while before she had left the port of Santiago, where she had touched for letters, brought over from Havana.

About the decks the officers and men were scattered, reading over and over again the sacred missives from those they loved in their far-away American land, and smiling with pleasure, or wiping away the tear-drop, as they read cheerful tidings, or of sorrow and misfortune.

Seated upon the quarter-deck of the Vidette, reading a package of letters, was Lucille Marsden, who several months before had been restored to her father's arms, by accident as it were, as the brigantine had sighted the shallow the second day after it left the Wreckers' Island, and giving chase, for Nick Nabob had dreaded an enemy, had overhauled and captured a prize that made the father's heart glad.

As the Tudors wished to return to their home in the North, Nick sailed with them for St. Augustine, and landed them in safety, while Lucille had remained with her father.

Determined to ascertain the fate of Howard De Vigne, and to break up the wreckers' band, Nick Nabob had headed for the cruising ground of the Vidette, after landing the Tudors, and in company with her set sail for the rocky island on which had stood the False Beacon.

But its deceitful rays did not greet him, as he had expected, and a force landing from the shallow, discovered that the ill-omened crew had flown, and, returning to the Vidette the ex-wrecker was made coxswain of the captain's gig, an honor he fully appreciated.

As Lucille sat reading her batch of letters, while her father was looking over his official correspondence, her face wore a look of sadness, which had haunted it since that fearful night when she saw Howard De Vigne sink beneath the waves.

Now, as she read a letter, her face suddenly paled, then flushed, while she cried in trembling tones:

"Father, I have a letter from Nellie Tudor, and she says she has just heard from Magdalene Fielding—you remember they were school-mates, and she ran off and married that wild young fellow, Mark Manly, who fought a duel with—with—Howard; well, she writes, that he has made Magdalene a good husband, and that they are now in Brazil, where Mr. Manly has had business to call him; but the strangest of all is that they were wrecked on the Bahama reef by the False Beacon, and—rescued from there by Howard De Vigne."

Captain Marsden sprung to his feet with flushed face, and cried, earnestly:

"God grant it, my child; but read on, read on!"

"She writes," resumed Lucille, excitedly, "that Howard professed to be sent from Don Diablo, killed the wrecker captain and won them over to him, and that he broke up the band as it was, and sailed for Vera Cruz, where he secured a vessel and went in search of this famous Red Rover, since which nothing has been heard of him; oh, father! can all this be true?"

"I trust so, from my heart, child, but—"

"Sail ho!"

Captain Marsden started at the cry from the fore-top, and glancing ahead, as the Vidette

suddenly forged beyond a heavily-wooded island point, saw a large vessel lying to, not a league distant.

"She's an American by her build, and— By Heaven! there lies a vessel the other side of her, and—to your guns, men! for yonder floats the black flag!"

The ringing tones of their captain caused every officer and man to spring to his feet ready for busy action.

Letters were thrust aside, and at once the deck became a busy scene, and in a few moments' time the crew were at the guns and the vessel ready for action.

"Lucille, I have been examining yonder craft attentively— Ha! there he leaves the ship, and has set her on fire; crowd on sail, Mr. Tudor, crowd on sail!" and Captain Marsden turned to his first officer, Randolph Tudor, and who was a son of Colonel Tudor.

"You were saying, father—" and Lucille looked up from the letter from Nellie, which she had again been reading.

"Yes, I was saying that yonder craft is the schooner of Don Diablo— Ah! there he gives us a good view of him now—it is the Sea Gipsy; ho, lads! yonder flies Don Diablo, the Red Rover!"

A cheer burst from the crew at these words, and the Vidette, under increased sail, went swiftly along in pursuit.

"The ship is signaling, sir; and they are fighting the fire hard," said Randolph Tudor.

"True; we must be humane first; head for the ship, helmsman, and we'll see what they want, and then continue on after the pirate, for he cannot run us out of sight, as I well know, having chased that same craft from New York to Vera Cruz."

The position of the three vessels now, was, the schooner nearly a league distant, heading in the direction of the Isle of Pines, and the large ship lying to, near a small island that had concealed her from the decks of the brigantine until almost within range of her guns, while the Vidette was heading for the merchant-vessel, from which she was distant not quite a mile.

As the Vidette drew nearer it was seen that the crew of the ship had fought down the fire, though that they had not expected to be able to do so was evident, as the boats had been lowered, one of which was pulling toward the brigantine, and contained half a dozen persons.

"Ho, the Vidette!" suddenly hailed a man in the boat, as the brigantine drew near.

"Ay, ay," replied Captain Marsden.

"Yonder schooner is the Sea Gipsy, under that sea fiend Don Diablo; he robbed the ship, but your coming frightened him off and he set her on fire; I beg that you allow me to board you and aid in the pursuit."

Captain Marsden was going to answer that he had no time to stop to pick him up, when Lucille cried:

"Father, that is Mark Manly! do you not recognize him? and that is his wife with him; please ask him on board."

"Luff, helmsman! luff sharp! steady now," called out Captain Marsden, quickly, and then calling to the boat he bade the oarsman come alongside.

The maneuver was quickly and skillfully executed, Mark Manly and his wife being drawn on board, without the headway of the brigantine being stopped, and at the gangway they were met by Captain Marsden, Randolph Tudor and Lucille, all of them having known each other in New York.

"Mrs. Manly, you owe it to Lucille that you are to enjoy a sea fight, for I stopped for you on her account, and you, Manly, shall serve as my aide."

"I will gladly do so, captain, I assure you, for I owe that Don Diablo a grudge, for his past treatment to friends of mine, and but for your coming he would have burned my ship, and we would have been captives; see how nimbly the fellow flies."

"But we gain on him—ah! he is changing his course, Tudor, so we'll head him off."

Randolph Tudor gave the necessary order, and the brigantine altered her course full a dozen points, by which she hoped to gain upon the pirate, whose strange maneuver now brought her in range.

"Down below, girls, for our work begins now; forward there! let him feel your metal!"

Hardly had the order left Captain Marsden's lips, when the bow guns burst forth with a terrific roar, and away flew the iron messengers, to fall near the corsair and sprinkle his decks with spray.

"Again, lads! aim true and knock his spars out of him, but save his hull!"

"Ay, ay, sir," came cheerily from the gunners, and once more the heavy pieces pealed forth, and one shot went through the mainsail of the pirate; but, before they could a third time belch forth their fury, one long, loud cry arose forward from a gunner's lips:

"Breakers ahead! hard! hard down!"

Sternly the order was repeated aft by both Captain Marsden and Randolph Tudor, and like lightning the helmsman made the wheel spin round, and the sharp bows swung quickly in obedience; but too late, for the impetus

drove the noble brigantine hard upon a sand-bar that lay hidden under the sea.

She struck hard, but fortunately her masts stood, and there remained, while suddenly the pirate was seen to put about, and rapidly his guns now poured forth their iron hail upon the defenseless Vidette.

"Thank God it was not a rock; but here she sticks, and will stick, until that devil knocks us to pieces," cried Captain Marsden.

"There's no water, sir, in the hold, and, if it wasn't for that pirate we could lighten her and float her off," reported the carpenter, coming aft.

"Yes, but that fellow is there, and will continue to fire upon us and perhaps cause us to take to our boats, for we cannot bring a gun to bear upon him; too bad! too bad!"

And too bad it certainly was, for cruising nearer and nearer, Don Diablo kept up an incessant fire, and his well-trained and long-experienced gunners sent their iron shots into hull and rigging of the Vidette, and brought many a gallant tar to the deck to die.

"Curses on him! that is why he changed his course, to bring us on that sunken sand-bar," said Randolph Tudor, pacing the deck like an enraged lion.

"Come, Tudor, we must lower the boats to leeward, and pull hard for yonder island, or he will kill us all, helpless as we are now; you go first with the ladies, and when you are out of range, I will set the poor craft afire and follow."

"Your duty, sir, is to your daughter, now that the ship is lost, so I will remain and bring the men off— Great God! see there!"

The startled cry of the young lieutenant caused every eye to turn in the direction he gazed, and from every lip broke an exclamation of surprise at what they beheld; but what it was the next chapter will reveal.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE SCARLET SCHOONER.

AT the cry of the startled crew, both Lucille Marsden and Magdalene had hastened on deck, and they, too, gazed at the strange sight in open-eyed wonder, for, sweeping out from behind an island, with a speed that seemed hardly possible with the breeze then blowing, came a vessel, the exact counterpart of the Sea Gipsy, with two exceptions.

Those exceptions were, first, that from hull to truck she was painted scarlet.

Yes, the long, low, gaunt hull, the pencil-like bowsprit, the tall masts, raking far aft, the yards, all were of a scarlet hue.

And more, the canvas, from jib to top-sails, was of the same crimson dye, while upon her decks was a crew that looked like grim Mephistos in their scarlet suits, manning guns that appeared red hot in their intense coloring.

This was one exception in the strange craft's likeness to the vessel of Don Diablo; the other was her flags, for she carried two, as did the Sea Gipsy.

Instead of the black flag floating at the Sea Gipsy's peak, on the Scarlet Schooner was a flag, with a red field, in the center of which was a black gallows, with a noose hanging from it, while at the fore, where Don Diablo had a flag with a green field in which was a Gipsy in black, the strange craft had a blue field, upon which was a white eagle strangling with his talons, and pecking with his beak, a large red sea serpent.

"He sails under no flag known to civilization, sir," said Randolph Tudor, lowering his glass after a close examination of the schooner.

"Captain, it is a scarlet craft I heard of on the South American coast, and it is said to be a phantom; see! Don Diablo is flying from him," and, at the words of Mark Manly, the crew broke forth in a wild cheer, for the Sea Gipsy, on catching sight of the red schooner, had suddenly ceased firing at the Vidette, and taken to flight, as though her crew had seen the Flying Dutchman, or the ghost of some craft they had sent to the bottom with all on board.

"Now, lads, to get the Vidette off! lower the extra spars, Mr. Tudor, and make a raft for our guns, and, when thus lightened, we'll tow her off with the boats," and, at the order of their captain, the brigantine's crew sprung to work with a will; but stopped suddenly to gaze when they saw the Scarlet Schooner receive the fire of the Sea Gipsy without any apparent harm.

Finding that he was cornered by islands and bars, Don Diablo put about to run around a point of land by which he could reach open water, and thereby brought his broadside to bear upon the Scarlet Schooner, and kept up a rapid running fire upon it.

But, whether it was the movement of the Sea Gipsy, the nervousness of her gunners at the close proximity of a vessel that they believed a phantom, and which did not return their fire, or what was the reason, none knew; but, certain it is, Don Diablo cursed his crew for lubberly marksmen, for they seemed to fire in vain.

And nearer and nearer came the Scarlet Schooner, until but a few lengths divided them, and the crews of the Vidette and the merchant

ship gazed on with the deepest interest to see what would be the result, for the blood-red color of the strange craft, her seemingly demon crew, her escaping uninjured, apparently, the shots of the pirate, and not firing in return, caused the superstitious seamen to believe also that she partook of the supernatural.

"See how the pirate yaws! his crew must be crazed with fear; by Neptune! I never saw a more masterly maneuver!" cried Captain Marsden, as the Scarlet Schooner was skillfully laid alongside the Sea Gipsy.

"Behold the red demons board! they look like flying harlequins; hurrah! hurrah!" shouted Randolph Tudor, and the crew took up the cheer and sent it ringing across the waters.

And thus they gazed for a few moments, night coming rapidly on, and the pistol flashes alone lighting up the scene through the gathering gloom.

But suddenly the rattle of firearms, clash of steel, and shouts of combatants ended, and silence fell upon the scene which darkness shut out, and only dimly in the distance were visible the two vessels lying side by side.

Yet still all eyes gazed over the expanse of waters, until the moon soared above the watery horizon and glimmered upon the sails of the two schooners that were approaching the spot where the Vidette lay, the one white and ghostly-looking in the silvery light, the other weird and fearful with its red sails reflecting back the radiance with supernatural glare.

Nearer and nearer they came, the Scarlet Schooner leading, and when within hailing distance there came ringing over the waters like clarion notes:

"The Vidette, ahoy!"

"Howard De Vigne's voice among a thousand!" cried Mark Manly, joyfully.

"Ho, the Scarlet Schooner!" shouted back Captain Marsden, while all listened breathlessly, and Lucille, like a statue, stood waiting, watching, longing to catch the next words.

"I will send boats to your aid and lighten you off that bar."

"Yes, it is, it is Howard's voice," cried Lucille, while her father shouted *ba k*.

"Ay, ay, many thanks; but come yourself, Captain De Vigne, for old friends await you; three cheers, lads, for the captor of Don Diablo!"

Three such cheers as the Vidette's crew gave were seldom heard on a craft of her tonnage, and, hardly had their echo died away when the Scarlet Schooner swept up into the wind and lay to, the Sea Gipsy immediately doing likewise, while from the two vessels boats put off, one of them black the other red, but with a scarlet-coated and capped crew in each.

Breathlessly all on the Vidette watched their approach, and the seamen were drawn up to receive the visitors, who the next moment sprung on deck three in number.

"Howard De Vigne, from my heart I welcome you," and Captain Marsden grasped the hand of the tall, splendid-looking man, who was clad from head to foot in scarlet.

"And here are others to welcome, Captain Marsden; Carter Dewy, whom you know, and my other lieutenant, Jack Waldron."

Captain Marsden greeted both officers warmly, and then said:

"And here are others to welcome you, De Vigne; come, Lucille, Magdalene, Tudor, Manly, Nick Nabob—in fact, come all of you, lads, and greet the victor over Don Diablo, if he does sail a vessel that looks as if she had just been launched in the infernal regions."

The meeting of Lucille and her lover, before others, was naturally constrained, and hearing Captain Marsden's remark, Howard De Vigne joined in the laugh about the infernal character of his schooner, and said:

"That was a device, captain, to add terror to Don Diablo, and as a red, haunting phantom we have tracked him from sea to sea, to at last run him to earth."

"And he is at last dead?"

"I hope so, though we could not find his body after the combat."

"He fought us like the devil he is, and for whom he is named, and my men say they saw him fall by the hand of one whom I believed a cabin-boy, but who proved to be a young Cuban girl by the name of Nita Sabinas, whom Don Diablo had cruelly wronged."

"She was wounded, and her sex thus discovered, and I fear she may die; but she avenged herself well, and all others whom that inhuman fiend has wronged."

"I do wish you had his body to be certain he is dead," said Captain Marsden.

"There can be no doubt of his death, for my crew showed no mercy, the pirates asked none, and the dead were at once thrown into the sea; but come, sir, let us get your vessel off this sand-bank."

"And then, De Vigne?"

"Ho for New York, where I intend to turn Don Diablo's schooner over to the Government, report my hunt for him the past months, and my action with him, and ask to have my dismissal revoked."

"It can be done; it will be done; now you and your friends go into the cabin and entertain

the ladies, and Tudor and myself will get the Vidette off this accursed sand-pile."

"And poor Nita Sabinas, Captain Marsden; may I have her brought here where Miss Lucille can care for her?"

"Certainly; my surgeon shall go at once for her, and she shall have every attention; now go into the cabin, where Manly will do the honors, and you can rest after your laurels, as you deserve, and within two hours I'll have the Vidette afloat."

And Captain Marsden kept his word, for, before midnight four vessels were heading for the western end of Cuba, the Scarlet Schooner leading, Mark Manly's clipper merchantman next, and the Sea Gipsy and Vidette, under shortened sail, bringing up the rear.

Once around the Island of Cuba, they shaped their course west by north-west, homeward bound.

CONCLUSION.

AN old history, of the stirring times in the early years of the nineteenth century, tells us, kind reader, that Reno Quesada, better known as Don Diablo, the Red Rover, was not killed in the action between his vessel and the Scarlet Schooner, but miraculously escaped to commit many a deed of crime ere he slipped the cable of life; but it says nothing of the other characters of my over long romance, so I, to fill in what the historian has left undone, will say that Howard De Vigne was reinstated in the navy, married Lucille Marsden, and, after many thrilling adventures on sea and land, died at a ripe old age, and, under his real name, which as a romancer I have not dared to use, lies buried in Trinity churchyard, with his beloved wife by his side.

Of Nita Sabinas's fate, other than that she recovered of her wound, little is known, though it is whispered that she won the name of the Cuban Nemesis ere she shuffled off this mortal coil.

And Jack Waldron, the adventurer, and one-time El Pirata, the rival of Don Diablo, sought a home for himself and bride in a foreign land, where all trace of them is lost, and where Jacobi Douro joined them, doubtless, as he left Vera Cruz, it was said, in fear of his life at the hands of Fernando Navaro, who developed into a gambler prince, and a most dangerous man, whom all that knew him dreaded.

Of the other characters of this story I can only say that they lived their allotted span of years and passed away, some to rest in the bosom of the earth, and others, the sailors, to find graves beneath the deep blue sea which in life they loved so well.

THE END.

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